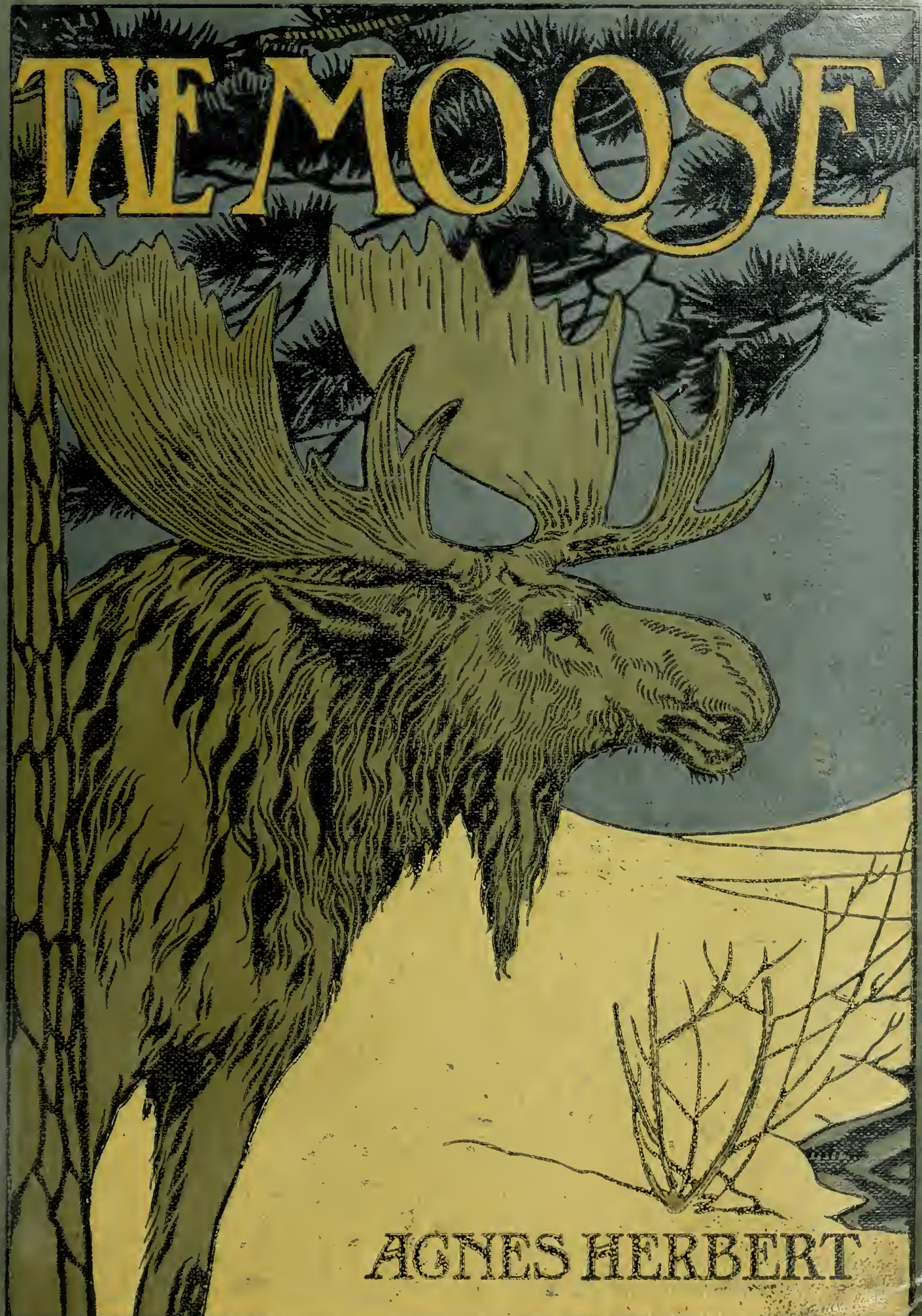
THE MOOSE



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THE MOOSE

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THE LIFE STORY OF A LION

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CALLING THE WOLF-PACK, *Page 134*

THE MOOSE

BY

AGNES HERBERT

AUTHOR OF
"THE LION" (IN THE "LIFE STORIES OF ANIMALS" SERIES)
"TWO DIANAS IN SOMALILAND," ETC.

WITH EIGHT FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS
BY
PATTEN WILSON

LONDON
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK
1913

"I have somewhat to inform you of concerning the Moose deer; but in general foreign animals fall seldom in my way."—GILBERT WHITE (twenty-seventh letter to Pennant).

16-103320-Mar 5

TO

MY MOTHER

"In mine eyes she is the sweetest lady ever I looked on."

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By PATTEN WILSON

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THE MOOSE

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND INFANT DAYS

"Nature hath made a fair creature."
As You Like It.

"In this covert will we make our stand,
Culling the principal of all the deer."
Henry VI.

He was born towards the middle of June, on an islet in a sheltered backwater of an Alaskan river, a still reach so extensive that to the moose calf it seemed a lake.

Not even his mother could call him beautiful. The little engineers and contractors working on the beaver dam, which would presently span the narrowest end of the lagoon, thought him downright ugly; but the beaver beauty standard is of their own making, and something we should not altogether understand.

There was a quaint and taking charm about the

ungainly little creature, who lay up for hours at a time on a soft bed of rotting leaves, as he tried hard to learn the art of mimicry his mother talked so much about, how to blend himself into the landscape, and how to turn himself into a colourable imitation of a tree root. His ears were enormous, and turned this way and that, one after the other, almost automatically, listening, listening. When he caught some small, sweet sound of the murmurous forest people or the splash of a trout midstream, his ears did not wait to locate and hold the noise as his mother's ears waited, but went on turning backwards and forwards uninterruptedly. It was as if the great flaps were so pleased with an hitherto unknown accomplishment that they could not but practice it.

Long, pale-coloured legs supported the calf's black-brown body, which was dotted over with noticeably lighter markings in the shape of well-defined spots, beauty marks his mother had long since lost. His hair was slightly roughed with the frizziness of extreme youth, like that of a new-born domestic calf, whose height would be just about that of the moose baby. His tail was a ridiculous tuft, hardly a tail at all, his neck so short that it

seemed planted straight on to his strongly built shoulders, and his curiously swollen knees looked like carelessly put on, ill-fitting plasters.

To the north and south of this most infinitesimal of islets, high alders formed a screen from the treacherous winds which at times lashed the lagoon into turmoil. On all sides rose hills, first in gentle slopes extending a long way, until they mounted tier on tier, towering aloft to altitudes of many thousands of feet. Between each mighty peak vast cañons and gorges lay, deep in snow, beneath which the roaring torrents hurled their icy waters downwards to the Sushitna River. The hill-sides everywhere were densely clad with alders, willows, birch, and mountain ash, and here and there bright patches of green carpeted a glade from which the snow had gone. Higher still lay the fields of perennial snow, which, defiant alike to sun and rain, formed a background in vivid contrast to the on-coming emerald tinge of spring.

The cow had crossed to the island in May, as the honeycombed ice gave signs of breaking, swimming and threading and forcing her way between the floes. Many moose who now roamed the wilderness as invincible lords of their tribe had been born in the

peace of the little sanctuary ; it had been the cow's own island for years, and no other had ever sought to contest sovereignty. Lesser creatures than moose lived there too, of course, and for these the cow had welcome. One and all had their uses, from the industrious musk-rats, who kept the lily roots free from the hampering sedge-grass cast loose by the wasteful ducks, to the small black bear, who had holed up on the island every winter of his life, and gave his wakeful spring of each year to rooting up the evil-smelling skunk cabbage.

The lagoon cleared of ice first, melting away of itself. The river next, a much slower process of disintegration ; and for days after her coming the cow heard the familiar sound of the great blocks sweeping down stream, grinding and crashing their passage to the distant sea. Sometimes an ice-jam occurred, blocking the current, and soon the lagoon felt the effects of the overflow, the island also, over whose shores the water rose and rose, until the alders and the scrub-bushes on the margin stood submerged, with just a fragile branch here and there waving in the breeze. Then, with a report like thunder, the crush of ice would give way before the fury of the pent-up stream, which, rush-

ing in foaming volume through the narrow, forced channel, cast the big floes hither and thither, stranding some upon the banks.

Above the islet, on an unclimbable rocky pinnacle, overshadowing a western slope, a solitary silver birch, of unusual height and girth, stretched out bare, wind-maimed limbs to the sky. Here Keneu, the bald, grey eagle, had his eyrie, from whence he kept grim watch over the sedge of the river. Sometimes, at dawn, he called in a prolonged screeching note as he hung out rain-drenched wings to dry in the palest of pale suns; and Mahng, the loon, would make answer, with an epitome of desolation in his tone, but no terror at all. So wonderful a diver had little to fear from aerial foes. His enemy was the mink, whose home was in the hollow base of the big tree growing at the side of the lagoon, where it widened out to meet the river. And some day that mink would get him. Mahng felt it in his bones!

For all the creatures of the islet—the black bear, who had just wakened up from his long winter sleep, and seemed some days to be drowsy still; the musk-rats; the otter; the mink; the ducks at the water's edge; and the beavers—the moose calf

entertained the deepest respect. They all seemed to know so much. To understand just what it was they wanted, and how to get it. And the beavers were the cleverest of all.

As soon as the calf showed any signs of intelligence, his mother told him of the debt all the animals of the world owe the tireless little workers of the beady eyes and sharp-pointed heads.

"But for the beavers," she said solemnly, "there would be no world at all."

The moose calf could not hear the story of the Flood too often; of the darkness and destruction; of the end and disintegration of all things; of the beaver, foreseeing as no other of the bush people, getting together in the face of all difficulties a little heap of mud, which he battered, and welded, and cemented into a shape of a world with the deftest of trowel tails, to which roughly-shaped sphere he added mud and yet more mud, until the universe existed again.

"Did she remember it?" the calf asked his mother interestedly.

The moose cow shook her head. The Flood was long, long ago, and merged on those fathomless spaces known as "Once upon a time," which

is farther back than the memory of the oldest moose living can go. Down the years the bush people have made it their duty to tell the beaver story to all the little ones, lest they forget. The moose herself had it from her mother's mother. It was a very old story indeed.

And when the young moose heard the tearing, splitting rustle of the birch bark peeling off under the scissor teeth of the universe-makers on the stillness and silence of the luminous northern night, he knew that, though they were so small and insignificant looking, the beavers were the greatest creatures he was ever likely to see. The builders of this wonderful world! This beautiful world, into which he had somehow strangely and luckily come; this land on which a perfect moon shone down to light the open glades with shafts of silver glory; of trees and water where the greenest rushes grew undisturbed in all the centuries, forming strong ramparts for the ducks to build in. And the beavers had made it all!

He knew now why they worked so tirelessly, so thoughtfully, so conscientiously. They had a reputation to maintain. He understood, too, the exact meaning of the proud motto of the beaver

tribe, which, the moose cow said, according to tradition, is to be found over the portal of every properly fitted-up beaver lodge for all those who understand beaver talk to read: "No beaver can be written out of reputation but by himself."

Then came the miserable day when the calf saw his mother enter the water on the sheltered side of the island to browse on lily roots, which she pulled up most dexterously and ate, with her flexible muzzle curling round the bulbs like a proboscis.

The sun, shining through the budding alder stems, flickered on the cow's ungainly form, huge ears, and square, wet nose. To the calf she seemed most beautiful, almost perfect, although a cow moose is, in reality, the plainest of all the deer tribe, if a creature of the wild, with all its manifold charms, can be called plain. Only one thing was lacking to make his mother peerless, the calf thought, and what it was he could not define. He had seen no other of his kind with which to compare her. He only knew instinctively that she needed a nameless something to complete her numerous graces. In later days he realized what it was—the unattainable splendour and spread of horns.

Deeper and deeper the cow pushed into the

budding lilies, until, suddenly, she lunged forward and the water took her, buoying her up as it did the beavers. Nothing but her head showed above the smooth surface. She was undoubtedly moving away from the islet, away from the calf. Frantically he ran to and fro amid the moist grasses of the shore bleating, bleating piteously. But the swimmer did not seem to hear or heed his cries, and presently the distance between the cow and the stretch of country where the big trees grew, and over which Keneu in his eyrie kept vigilant watch, diminished to nothing.

She was high in the water now, and the calf, with wonderment in his pathetic eyes, saw his mother shake herself free of the lagoon and commence climbing the steepness of the opposite bank. Just for a moment she stood on its summit, a mere speck against the fretted silhouette of dark trees behind her. Then, like a grey wraith, she vanished into the waiting shadows.

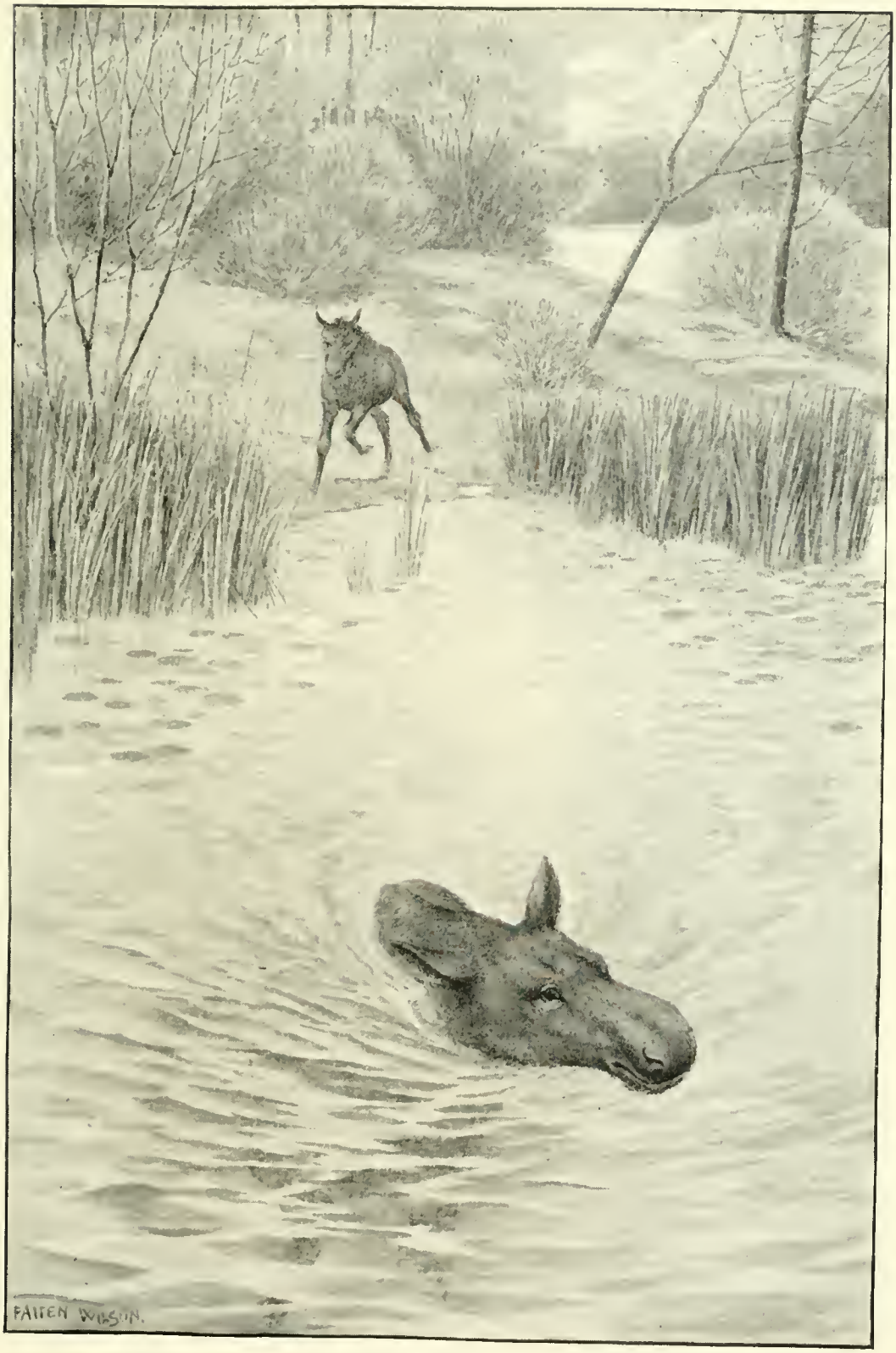
Would she ever come back? the calf asked himself broken-heartedly. And if she did not, what would become of him? His idea of browsing was as yet but an idea; the sprouting stems of the larch and willows were too tough for him to tackle, and his

neck was too short to allow him to try and crop the short grass which upholstered every solitude in scanty covering of green. He was afraid, too—afraid of the silence, of the unutterable loneliness, and hid away in the dim covert overhung with alders where he was born. Once, as he heard a beaver's tail hit the water with a resounding smack, the forsaken little one cried to himself in a curious choking bleat, which raised a controversy among the ducks as to which of their number was calling.

"It is Pishnekuh, the black goose, coming here to nest," they said. "He is late this year."

And they looked up into the clouds to try and locate the familiar wedge-like form. The sky was empty, save for the circling flight of two golden eagles, wheeling slowly round and round against a darkening sky. There was something very ruthless in their purposeful flight, something wildly lonely and grand and aloof. Deep down in a rocky cañon was the allurement of a fallen white sheep—banquet to be! Yet there was no hurry, such as the Vulturidæ display.

The hermit thrushes called out the calf, as they shrilled with a hundred flutes the song of another spring. So many together made a really big



"THE WATER TOOK HER"

vibrating noise, and the sopranos and contraltos combined to create a most harmonious choir. The magic of the silvery voices gave the moose courage, and more than anything just then he wanted to see one of the tiny atoms whose music daily wakes the bush in spring from sleep. Any little alarm, crack of twig, or ominous rustle in the undergrowth, sent him back at first with beating heart to the comparative safety of his covert; but gradually the confidence and inquisitiveness of youth conquered, and he forgot everything save how young he was, and how much he thanked the beavers for saving the world for him. Tossing his quaintly charming head, he took some gigantic leaps into the air, kicking out his long legs when at the height of his jump.

Carefully the calf approached the thick brushwood, and as he came the bird popped out on the other side, Silence awhile. Then a trying-it-on-sort of chirrup, then another in more assertive tones, and soon all the island was ringing again with the glorious twisting notes.

The day had been so perfect, the sad day of the moose cow's going. The calf had even seen his first butterfly, a frail wraith fluttering weakly over the river, into which it fell, and ended its brief career.

Not far from the covert was the first ptarmigan's nest, and the hen was sitting. It was placed in the open, exposed to the sun in excellent position for marauding minks. It was the ptarmigan's first season. Next year she would be wiser and build on a hill-side among the marmots. The milk of bush kindness dries early in the mink. They have no sympathy.

On this quiet lagoon, where the trappers had ceased from troubling, for the reason that as yet no trapper had found it out, the beavers were unmolested, and could be seen in great numbers all along the river banks, or dabbling in the mud at its marge. One or two daring spirits investigated thoroughly the wandering calf, lifting rounded noses clear of the water, sniffing, and gazing at him with beady, interested eyes. They knew him quite well by sight, but this roaming spirit was something fresh, surely? Where was his guardian, their familiar friend of years? And satisfied that there really was something untoward afoot, the investigator dived quickly, and in turning over the strong wide tail hit the water with a smack, a "save yourselves" signal, which sent every beaver scuttling.

The calf would have liked to see the beavers

actually at work on tree-felling, even though he knew they were only busy at night. All about him was the result of their labours, felled trees of small girth, poplars, and cotton-woods, and, at the river's edge, disappearing branches vanishing to the beaver pantry below.

He stood awhile, four feet together, poised like a klipspringer, on the top of one of the marvellously planned beaver residences lying on the bank, balancing himself mischievously on its domed roof, made of logs and sticks, and plastered together with river mud and clay.

He tired of this at last, perhaps because the beavers seemed so indifferent, as they well might be, seeing that the miniature house was closed for alterations and repairs, and belonged to no one, and watched the black bear from a safe distance—since the temper of black bears was an unknown quantity as yet—catching mice in their runways.

This was accomplished by scraping down to an insignificant depth, and throwing out the excavated earth with a deft left hand, and keeping a sharp look out for fugitives. Once in a while the bear applied his nose to the tiny furrow and sniffed deeply, but for the most part he worked in silence

and at great speed. Reaching the end of the run, the despoiler blocked the exit cleverly, and finding a mouse at home, pressed him down with an odd blow of a quick right hand, after which the luckless atom was devoured. One, two, three successful hunts, and the moose calf passed on. Such ruthless slaughter, though fascinating to watch by reason of its dexterity, made him afraid. What if his turn should come next! After all, he knew practically nothing of the habits of this lonely male bear, and how far they coincided with anything he had heard his mother say of the ways of the huge brown beasts he would one day meet in other scenes. She had never seemed to fear her companion of the island. He took comfort from that.

A light, white vaprous mist enshrouded the lagoon, through which the ducks sped to and fro, hither and thither, in chattering concert. Had the calf been a little older, he would have known what such unusual noise and activity presaged. When ducks are unduly conversational the barometer is falling.

The short, sharp bark of a fox cut the silence, and as the night closed in the forsaken little one heard

the eerie long-drawn hunting call which any bush creature is able to pick out, even a tenderfoot new to the wild. Up and down his spine pricked something the calf had never felt before. He shook himself, and was startled to realize that his young limbs were trembling violently.

Hungry and indescribably forlorn, he sought his bed of rotting leaves, his one home in all the vastness round about him. He knew himself forsaken now, and his end certain. No other of his kind lived on the island, or perhaps he would have gone to them for help. Had not his mother told him of the infinite charity of many a cow moose, of the foster children she herself had reared?

He thought himself too wretched to sleep, but the necromancy of the night and the silence of resting things lulled him to slumber.

An exploring mink, dwelling softly on partly webbed toes, took a look into the gloomy covert with diamond bright eyes, before passing on to dig for beetles and larvæ in the soft soil below the trees. He had no great admiration for moose, who could swim certainly, indifferently well compared with the mink, and climb trees not at all. But the small beast lying alone in the brake looked pretty enough,

and his coat outshone the mink's, whose exquisite winter robe was leaving him. He was weary of the water, tired of the extended trips below the ice, and the musk-rats provided poor hunting just now. Not that a business-like mink need fear the warlike methods of musk-rats defending their young—a mink is afraid of few animals. Let what will attack him, a couple of agile jumps and he can outclimb a squirrel, or with a twirl and a dive gain the water in which he is as much at home as a fish.

The moose calf lay cosily until dawn, to waken with a start to hear the wind rushing down from the mountain-tops to beat with tempestuous wings against the walls of spring.

"Tarry yet awhile!" whistled the keen breath of the snow-sheeted peaks. "Tarry yet awhile!"

And, as if in mockery, the laughing chuckle of the cock ptarmigan echoed across the river.

The rain swung over the lagoon, beating down the rushes and the alder stems. Where the calf lay up, snug and warm, the drenching rain could not penetrate; his mother had chosen well. And at the memory of her forethought the young one's heart nearly broke in twain. Why had she gone? Why? It was cruel, cruel! To what end had he

been born; to what. . . . It had ceased raining suddenly, and the air in the freshness of early morning was peculiarly resonant.

"Buagh! buagh!" sounded in smothered tones across the water.

The calf sprang up, bleating. The joy that filled him was almost a pain. He ran to the edge of the lagoon, he could not tell why, and, lifting his nose in the air, sniffed the breeze.

A big beast was crossing to the island, coming nearer every instant. Fascinated, the young moose watched the ripples widening out into half-circles and fall behind.

"Buagh! buagh!" once more.

Then the little one could stand still no longer. He must jump and run and caper. And as the swimmer neared the shore, and he caught the gleam of deep-set eyes, he rushed out breast-deep, regardless of the wavelets left by the recent storm.

Laying his charming head against his mother's dripping side, he questioned her absence not at all. It was enough that she had come back to him.

Presently—after they had both satisfied their hunger—she told him all about it, of the impulse which urged her suddenly to assure herself that her

young one of last year was safe where she had left him previous to her coming to the island, and of the dangers that beset her almost as soon as she entered the opposite woods. The smoking embers of a fire was evidence to an old and worldly-wise beast like herself of the presence of those strange two-legged creatures from afar who are more to be dreaded than the wolves in winter. Then the devil-stick, whose breath means death and desolation to whom it touches spoke, and the dogs—fierce beasts akin to the wolves—gave tongue and chase. Only by a miracle and her own adroitness had she escaped alive.

The calf did not understand what it all meant, but he shivered involuntarily, drawing closer; and the cow, realizing his pathetic ignorance, licked his soft coat sympathetically. She was safe, so what matter? All through the night she had schemed and plotted how best to get back to the island unseen, circling wide in order to put her enemies off the track.

But their little home set in the rushes of the lagoon was a sanctuary no longer. The despoilers were abroad, and any day might descend on the island dwellers.

"But why?" asked the calf in wonderment.

The cow could not tell, since the pelts of the fur-bearing creatures, for which very often these humans came, were at this season not worth the taking, and the horns of the bull moose were tender and small, pulsating with life, a trouble and annoyance even to their wearer. Who could say why these two-legged wanderers had penetrated this heart of the wildest wilderness? Perhaps they did not know themselves. They were very like the otter in winter, always wanting to be somewhere else.

And when the calf would hear how it was his mother knew so much, she showed him an indented, scarred cicatrix on her shoulder over which the hair did not grow.

He looked at the hideous mark fearfully, with wide, terrified eyes.

"Not many of our kind carry a wound like that and live!" his mother said solemnly.

The sun seemed to go out; the sigh of the wind, beautiful no longer, sobbed of cruelty and pain.

Perhaps, perhaps, the beavers would have done better had they let the world go to pieces, after all!

CHAPTER II

STEPPING-STONES

"They kill us for their sport."
King Lear.

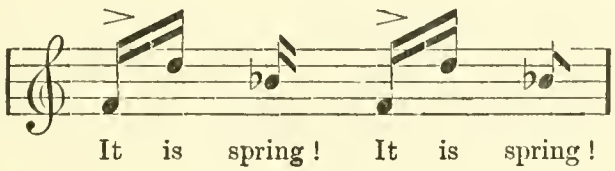
Lying up that night in the sheltered covert, close to his mother's side, listening to her soft-drawn breath, the calf pondered many things. Whence came the hunting beasts allied to the wolves, of which the cow had spoken so fearfully? Why did they traitorously forget their kinship with all the wild? When she wakened he would ask her. She slept heavily, and dawn had come.

Spring was in all the air, though the deeper solitudes still lay in thrall to the grip of the winter. The birds were busy, with that peculiar solemnity of purpose which belongs to nesting-time. The golden crown, a sparrow of exalted plumage, crept in and out the grass-spears—he was just everywhere, the plaintive minstrel. And that most beautiful of all small birds, that little ball of fluff we call the

chestnut-backed chickadee, searched assiduously for a perfect nesting-place.

Hanging on to the end of a dwarf alder bough, swinging above the calf's wet nose, was the half-built nest of the golden-crowned kinglet, an exquisite in tiny birds. Moss framed its outer covering, and feathers the inside, and to compact and cement the whole the spiders had contributed lavishly of their webs.

Close to the surface of the water an iridescent belted kingfisher hawked for insects, his crest in spring splendour, and all else of him resplendent. From every side came the liquid, trilling tones of the hermit thrush, drowning the choir of energetic ducks.



The bush people should not remain in ignorance of the season, an the thrush could help it.

Before the cow had time to realize that she was thoroughly awake, the calf asked why the dogs allied to the wolves fought against the wilderness people. What about the law of Bush Brotherhood

of which he had heard so much? And could all wolves turn at will into dogs?

The soft-eyed cow meditated awhile before she answered. It is so hard to explain to the young, who will have the gaps of everything filled, and the old know that there are always rifts somewhere, that some things must unravel themselves. The story of the dogs that once were wolves, best known of all the bush stories, won't bear to searching an investigation—its pitfalls are too many.

At last, using the world-old formula, "Once upon a time," because she knew that no tale is really worth while without the magic "Open Sesame," the cow began the familiar story of the bad year, the rabbit plague year, that recurring seventh year in which all the rabbits die off.

No, it was not possible for her to explain why the rabbits die off each seventh year. It must be accepted as a tragic and undeniable bush truth. It is Nature's method, perhaps, of keeping the prolific rabbits under.

Famine stalked the wilderness, with death and destruction at his heels, and on none of the bush people did hunger press so heavily as the wolves, whose numbers had thinned down under the stress

of the times to a miserable wasted four, led by Apukwa, the tailless.

Apukwa had not always been tailless. She lost her fine brush in a domestic jar, a mere trifling squabble, illustrating all that is best and most characteristic in wolf family life. For weeks she hoped that the ornament would grow again, and for minutes at a time stood over a little backwater looking down at her reflection in the gleaming surface, waiting expectantly for that once magnificent tail to sprout in all its glory. But it never came, it never came! Before long she began to make a beauty of her disfigurement, to feel proud of being distinguished above her kind. Apukwa the tailless! It was a title worth having.

It seemed to the wolf, in those days of trouble, that rabbits were the hub on which the wild world turned. She had never thought much about them before, preferring larger game; but she realized now that the larger game depended indirectly for life on the insignificant rabbit. Indeed, few creatures but the moose, the caribou, and the bear, seemed able to organize existence without the rabbit. Even the wolves, fearless and desperate hunters, had not the strength to go moose-hunting unless

bolstered up to it by—rabbit! Undoubtedly, the rabbit was absolutely indispensable, and by stupidly contracting the mysterious disease, as they never failed to do every seven years, the rabbits had dispensed with themselves.

Apukwa cast about in her fertile brain for some plan which should better things a trifle for herself, and came to the conclusion that she ought to attach herself to some great strong, mighty creature, the very greatest and strongest and mightiest creature in the world, who would fight all battles, provide food, and fend for the worn-out wolf generally.

The difficulty was how to find this superior and invincible leader. The wolf's lengthy experience had taught her that it is not always the largest animal who is the bravest and wisest. Size often counts for very little among the beasts. Cunning and strategy, and never-failing courage were the only attributes worth having. Which of the bush creatures had these qualities most highly developed?

Apukwa answered her own query mistakenly, mostly because she did not give herself sufficient time in which to think it out. However, as she said to herself philosophically later, when launched well into the awkward results, a wolf who never

made a mistake never made a discovery, and she very soon found, as do all exploring minds, that there is no mistake so great as the mistake of not going on.

She chose the caribou as leader. It appeared so confident as it crossed the snow wastes, and trotted so purposefully, head in air, for all the world as though it had some weighty object in view. When that object turned out to be nothing but some lichen which the big deer got at by laboriously scratching away the snow, the wolf realized only too well that this was not the animal she ought to have followed, this shy, unassuming, herbage-eating creature! Wisest of wise wolves, as she thought herself, she had been deceived by ornament, and took it for granted that a beast so imposing must be as clever as he looked. The stag was an old fellow, with exceptionally finely palmated horns on the brow and bez tines, and this gave him a grand, rugged appearance such as the wolf had never observed in any caribou before.

It seemed a direct intervention of Providence that a large brown bear should appear on the scene to put an end to the caribou's existence by driving him over a precipitous cañon, down which the

big deer tumbled obligingly, putting up no sort of a fight.

The wolf looked at the conqueror, as he stood, with hunched shoulders, peering down into the ravine. Here, of course, was the invincible, with whom she ought to throw in her lot. He was wonderful! Bigger far than any grizzly, with immensely long and powerful claws, curved and dark in colour.

Down the steep bluff, clothed to the bottom with thickly-growing salmon-berry bushes, the bear scrambled and lurched his way, followed by Apukwa, who slid down four feet together, after the fashion of an otter on its slide.

The bear ate until satisfied, and then the gaunt wolf, who had been sitting on her haunches a few feet away, had her share. More than ever, as she bolted tasty morsels of her departed broken reed of a leader, was she convinced that here beside her, licking his paws, as story-book bears always do, was the animal to follow. Hitch her waggon to this bear, and, rabbits or no rabbits, the future was provided against.

Almost before the wolf had become accustomed to the ease and comfort of her lot, the brown

bear got himself mixed up in an unsought deadly quarrel with a bull moose—a perfect mammoth. Apukwa, retailing the story long afterwards to the bush people, said that the span of his horns filled the valley from mountain to mountain, which was stretching things a little, but true in the main. The moose was a big one.

Bruin was lying beside an alder tangle, and the moose accidentally bounded right on to the prostrate bulk, who got up, growling furiously, his great head outlined against the undergrowth behind him, and carried so low that the arches of his shoulders appeared to equalize the extraordinary width of his skull and the depth from nose to ear.

Rising on hind-feet, snorting and gasping in little spurts of sound, the bear seemed to expect the impact he met. Whether the big moose wished to give battle, or had it forced by fear upon him, Apukwa never knew. All she realized was the patent fact that her protector, the invincible one, lay dead from the effects of a carefully placed thrust from a razor hoof.

Once more the wolf was thrown on a cold world to fight for herself. Quickly adjusting herself to circumstances—for she was nothing if not adapt-

able—she decided on following the conqueror, who appeared to have no use for the huge banquet lying by the alder scrub, which he left to the ravens and the eagles.

The world went very well for Apukwa so long as the bear carcass lasted. After its consumption the moose displayed complete indifference in the matter of obtaining more flesh food, and seemed quite content with alder tops and sapless bark, in which unwolflike meals Apukwa took no interest. Day after day as she watched her leader calmly plucking the leaves around him, or straddling tall bushes with his fore-legs until he got the topmost branches within easy reach of his prehensile nose, she wished herself a free-lance once more in a rabbit-thronged world.

For all that she told herself consolingly that she was following a worthy beast. There could be no mightier.

Suddenly the twang of a bowstring cut the air, and the great moose crumpled up like the lake lilies in the early frost, crumpled up and lay shuddering.

Out of a thick patch of cover came the strangest being Apukwa had ever seen—a very small thing

THE COMBAT

to slay the largest of the bush people so simply. Round about his sinewy body he wore a long coat made of caribou skin, and decorated most ingeniously round the hem by bits of vari-coloured furs let in.

The two-legged conqueror flayed his victim, and then, cutting off a choice bit of meat—that which lies alongside the back-bone—he turned down the trail, carrying his load on his shoulder. With a gesture of authority he ordered Apukwa to heel, never doubting but that she would obey. And the wolf followed. The impelling air of the man, though he was smaller far than the caribou, the bear, or the moose, spoke with a force as mighty in its way as the thunder or the rain.

And as they went Apukwa watched the limitless freedom of her new leader's gait. He walked as though the whole world lay beneath his moccasined feet, and it was wholly his !

It was of his walk she spoke most, as she told her story to the survivors of the once great wolf pack, standing at the aperture in the rough hut of skins belonging to her master.

" He moves," she said, " like us—like the bush people. Like this !" And loping forward a few

steps, she imitated the undulating movement of a wolf at the gallop.

"Come back and lead us, tailless one!" the wolves howled drearily. "We cannot hunt without you. Come back! come back!"

But Apukwa never went back. She had tasted of comfortable servitude, and it had killed the love of freedom, which is how it is sometimes.

Very often at night, as she lay curled up at the Indian's feet, she heard the call of her people, sobbing down the night wind.

"Come back! come back! Come back and lead us, A-a-a-a-a-apukwa!" And curling herself closer she shut her ears.

Long afterwards the bush people saw her at the heels of the lithe being, fur-clad like themselves, followed by four little gambolling fluffy atoms, tailless, too, like Apukwa, yet not entirely wolves.

Thus the alien race was started, the race of beasts called dogs.

The story was all too short for the calf, who would, and he could, have followed out the career of Apukwa to the day of her death; but there were other stories, much more useful, to which he had to listen—bush lessons a young

moose must learn, and wilderness lore of all kinds to master ere he could earn the freedom of the wild.

He was warned against the trappers who come North yearly to hunt the bush folk for their hides, and taught something of their methods as they affect the moose tribe. Some of the despoilers, the cow said, possess an almost supernatural knowledge of the habits of the big deer, and can find their most loved haunts, sleeping places, and roads to the river in any weather; guess, too, within an inch or so, the span of horns of a moose going like the wind, and tell his length of years by antlers, bell, and coat.

Horrid facts of the traps set were detailed. These, laid after the time of horn-shedding, snared moose as ignominiously as rabbits, in a loop, three feet or so in diameter, artfully arranged on much used trails running through thick brushwood, at the approximate height of a fair sized bull. Attached to the other end of the rope was a movable, but heavy, baulk of timber. A moose sauntering down the track in the dusk was practically certain to put his head through the dangling snare, which, tightening as he rushed away in terror, commenced the

business of strangulation that the heavy piece of timber, now thoroughly mixed up in the trees, finished off.

"Calling," also, the moose cow dwelt on, that system acceptedly installed and held high in honour among sportsmen, who are by its means enabled to get a choice of heads.

In Alaska the primitive birch-bark horn is not used as a lure to attract the bull moose by imitating the call of the cow, as it is in New Brunswick and the Mic-Mac hunting-grounds. Northern adepts employ, instead of the counterfeit mating cry, the war challenge of the bull, making it cleverly by means of mouth and hands.

All these cautions the calf weighed up in his wise young way. Never would he answer a challenger until the position of things was thoroughly sifted. A mere call to arms should not allure him. He knew all about it; forewarned, he was forearmed.

The cow looked at him pityingly, understanding, as she did, that almost any noise will bring up a moose at the right season. The call comes and cannot be resisted. And the memory of her last mate rushing on to his end came back to her. The sound of wood-chopping attracted him. The bush

was full of pitfalls. The calf must beware of them all.

He learnt of the wonderful antlers his head would one day carry, of their growing soft and sensitive in spring and summer, until late autumn saw them hard and bony, and winter their fall.

When the calf would know why horns which had taken so much strength and time to manufacture should ever be cast off, his mother had no satisfactory solution to offer. A wiser than the cow might fail at answering that.

As to why the bull moose is hornless at the very season, of all others, when he might be of protective use, she could not explain either. The advantage of horns? Well, for herself the moose cow had observed that when it came to meeting an enemy from whom it was impossible to flee, a real fighter valued the striking power of his fore-feet far more than he did the latent strength lying in his spread of horn. In battling for a mate—ah! then the victory was to the best-antlered.

With an odd little thrill of pride the calf pictured himself next year perhaps, or at latest two seasons hence, adorned by the glorious crown his mother described so well, and was rather dashed to learn

that it would take him nine seasons to touch perfection, and two or three before a palmated condition worth noticing elaborated itself from his yearling spike.

Never mind! Some day he would be crowned like the superiors of his kind. Until then he must wait patiently as a hornless moose can.

The cow winced. It was her one weak spot, and the calf, inadvertently had touched on it. She never forgot—no moose cow ever forgets—that the females of her near relatives, the caribou, are as well antlered as the males. And since no animal anywhere can be really happy without a grievance, she found hers here, dwelling with melancholy pleasure on the unfair division of things.

On the tundras and lower mountain slopes roamed the crowned ones, and down in the sheltered valleys, swamps, and forested areas, the cows of another tribe cried in vain for the regal headgear.

The cow had not forgotten her old mother's theory, which held that female caribou must be antlered or die at once, since an inhospitable region, in which there are wolves to be fought incessantly and snow to shovel, demands horns for all; but jealousy made her regardless. She wept for her

antlers, and would not be comforted because they were not.

It was very pleasant lying up in the covert listening to the moose cow's wisdom, wilderness lore of all kinds, gathered up through the years. But for the disturbing recollection of the half-understood dangers lurking in the woods beyond, the world went very well then. No calf could ask happier hours.

He heard some of the fairy stories of moose land, fantastical legends odd and miraculous as our own, tales of implacable animal gnomes smaller than the squirrels, whose little furrows through the paths of the forest the Puk-wudjies, whom few moose have ever seen, imitate.

Alaskan gnomes—queer, small, hairy, boot-button eyed—are something like weasels, something like minks, but are quite unlike the sprites of our civilized countries in that they are of one class only—the spiteful malevolent variety, of whom quite the most evil are the spirits who dwell far inland from the coast in the Nunataks, or peaks, which are to be seen in the heart of the glaciers.

The special function of the Nunataks is to work havoc to the moose and caribou feeding-grounds,

to steal the salmon from the bears, rob the eagles of their eggs, drive the seals on to rocks, and generally make themselves all round disagreeable.

The moose cow gave it as her opinion, unsupported certainly, but her own for all that, that the Nunataks had more than a little to do with the wholesale mortality which exterminated the rabbits every seven years. They could say also, if they would, whence and why the martens vanish. Each decade sees them disappear absolutely, and no tell-tale bodies lie about the bush which, for a time, knows them no more. Where do they go and how?

The Nunataks know all about it!

It was of the forest-dwelling Puk-wudjies the calf most liked to be told. Ill-balanced spirits, also, with no redeeming qualities, with whom it behoved a moose to keep on good terms.

He heard of no good fairies, because there are no good fairies in Alaska to hear of—the goblins of Grimm alone hold sway. Oberon and Titania could not live in the frozen ways of the Arctic region, needing the sun of the South to gild their revelries.

Calf-grabbing is to-day as popular with the Puk-wudjies as child-abduction used to be with our own fairies before we killed them off and crippled

them with disbelief. And in this connexion the cow had a very sad family episode to relate.

It happened to her own great-great-great-aunt, which is much nearer than authentic fairy stories usually come, and, handed down orally as the tale had been, there could be no doubt that it actually happened.

It began on an island (replica of the one on which her indirect descendant listened to the story), to which the old cow moved each spring, hoping and hoping for the calf who never came. All other cows of her acquaintance had more young ones than they wanted, voted them a nuisance, and seemed bored by their odd little ways. And here she was, an old beast now, eleven years old—and eleven years is a good slice out of a moose cow's active life—with no calf at all!

She put all her disappointment and blighted hopes down to the fact that she had once put her heavy right fore-foot on to an unnoticed Puk-wudjie dancing in the centre of a moose trail, which is just what you might expect of a gnome who will take no part in making the universally accepted type of fairy ring.

Then a moose miracle happened.

Next season saw the birth of the most wonderfull calf of the year, an exquisite creature so perfect in feature and form that all the animals on the islet talked of little else, and came in bodies to offer congratulations. Even the hermit-beaver from the other side of the water—a drone turned out by the beaver community because he made nothing but speeches about a three hours' working night—hearing of the exceptionally beautiful new arrival, swam across for a private view. He never appeared in public if he could help it, because he was ashamed of the triangle-shaped wedge missing from his tail, a hall-mark designed, patented, and executed by the world-savers for the beaver who will not work.

Next morning when she awakened the old cow found her calf missing. In his place lay a horrible little furry animal, sharp-clawed and toothed, with the wickedness of the centuries at the back of his eyes.

She knew it for a Puk-wudjie at once. It was exactly like the specimen who had danced upon the moose trail; and she realized that the only thing for her to do was to put some distance between herself and the evil thing.

Into the river she plunged, and made the other

side easily, only to be gripped by something that looked like scrub-tangle overhanging the stream, and wasn't scrub-tangle at all really, but a band of sprites lying in wait. Thrusting the poor cow under, they drowned her remorselessly.

If the story saddened the calf a trifle, he was not too much affected to press for more. He heard the reason why the moose of the Kenai district carry the finest heads in the world, and why the young bull moose wears a bell.

"Once upon a time," the tale naturally commenced, or how could the little one care to listen? "Once upon a time" a bull moose lived in the Canadian backwoods, a fine upstanding beast, but lacking, like all his tribe, the fine hairy dewlap which now adds so much to their appearance.

The stock from a large cattle ranche roamed the forest, too, led by a domestic cow, wise as she was ancient. Red and white steers, black and white heifers, all red, all black, all white, followed her, for she could lead them to the best feeding-grounds, guide them to the wild onion patches, and find the way over the most spreading of marshes.

Round her neck, on a strong leather strap, she wore a heavy and never silent bell.

Tink! Tonk! Tink! Tonk!

The bell was the one thing the bull moose envied. The cow's horns were nothing—nothing at all, mere crumpled uselessnesses. Her bush wisdom, too, what was it? A superficial thing, forced on her by circumstances, a sense of self-preservation any forest alien could acquire.

But the bell! The bell that drew all after her!

Tink! Tonk! Tink! Tonk!

Then came a hot summer, which saw the greatest bush-fire of the century. Other fires there had been in the moose bull's memory—silly little blazes that flamed up and died out as they started, and more fiercely burning holocausts that laid waste a quarter mile or so of luxuriant country—but never anything approaching this red-tongued demon who gulped up the belts of moose grass round the marshes, the undergrowth and branches of mighty trees, leaving nothing standing but blackened stems and a desolate wilderness.

With a curious muffled roar like that of a river in spate, the fire in three-sided column swept along. Hither and thither the bush people rushed frenziedly, breaking cover at all points.

An experienced old moose cow, who counted the

seasons by bush-fires, submerged herself nose deep in the muddy shallows of the lake, there to remain until the belching smoke and flames rolled by.

Practically all the bush people made for safety down the one open run of forest cover, and, guided by instinct, passed out of the zone of danger. Only the big bull moose remained hovering on the verge of the flames until the last, and this because he wanted to see how the bell-cow would set about leading her stupid charges. Would the magic bell lure still? Would the cattle follow its charmed sound through anything?

The old cow stood petrified, upbraiding her young followers for their foolishness in coming to this thickly-grown and sun-dried patch of forest, where a flare-up might be expected at any moment.

One young steer, with massive shoulders like a wall, volunteered to break back if the rest would follow—a senseless procedure when the way ahead lay open; but all remained wild-eyed waiting for the cow, unheeding the road to safety, which lessened its breadth each instant. Soon the leaping tongues, curling along, would converge, and encircling the whole area, burn it out.

In a flash it struck the moose that the cow was

no leader at all. He had suspected it before—suspected that all her ability lay in the bell she wore, and he knew now. An animal fitted by nature to lead and govern others never complains of the incompetence of his fellows, of their shortcomings, incapability, and stupidity. A born leader sees in these things the proof of power—the power to meet and beat them.

Moving forward in a rapid, swinging trot, the moose ranged alongside the terror-stricken herd. The air was growing appreciably hotter each second, and high above the trees rose cindered leaves and dancing sparks, which fell back to earth in a shower of golden rain. The crackle of burning wood sounded louder. Away to the north rolled a dense pall of smoke.

"The bell!" said the moose, commandingly. "Lead the way!"

But the cow did not move. Her limbs were useless, and her eyes stared uncomprehendingly.

The bull's horns were soft and useless; therefore, because he thought so great a coward should die, and quickly, he used his fore-hoofs, and with two driving blows slew the cow where she stood; and as she dropped the bell jangled a dismal requiem.

It was all he took from her. Other attributes of a leader he had in full measure. This, the coveted Pied Piper of the bush, made him a guide indeed!

Setting it on a throbbing point of his velvety antlers, he walked forward proudly, throwing up his splendid head.

Tink! Tonk! Tink! Tonk!

One by one the animals fell into line, and followed the sound they could not resist. It led to safety—to wide, green tracts enfiladed on all sides by rivers and lagoons, over which no forest-fires had ever passed.

There the bull left them leaderless, streaking off silently as his charges slept, since no king of the wild could bear to be tied down by the inactivities and petty smallnesses of domestic beasts such as these.

He left them, but took the prerogative of a leader with him. Down the rides of the forest his swift rush carried him, through deep brushwood and barring fallen trees. And faint on the night wind sounded the deep-toned bell.

Tink! Tonk! Tink! Tonk!

This the moose handed down to all the moose

tribe coming after, though Time, "great-sized monster of ingratitude," who scraps everything, has reduced its value by removing the tongue that spoke, lest it should lead into danger animals whose place is in the gardens of the wild, even whilst he granted, old justice as he is, the right of the bull moose to wear for ever an outward and visible sign of an episode immortal in moose history.

CHAPTER III

YOUTHFUL EXPERIENCES

"You are afraid, if you see the bear loose, are you not?"
Merry Wives of Windsor.

SHE bade him strike out and fear nothing, but he stood on the shore bleating, timorous and afraid. Three times she swam out into open water, forth and back, until, finding all efforts at encouragement unavailing, she took to more drastic methods, and viciously butted and pushed the shrinking calf into the rushes fringing the islet.

The water was over his hocks, his thighs, closed above his head! His feet touched bottom, an oozy substance which gave no foothold. Then some force, dominating his will, flung out his limbs, and lo! he found himself buoyed up and riding the lake like the beavers. The distance to the opposite shore was lessening with every forward stroke of his labouring shoulders—he could see that quite well. An oddly-shapen mystery on which he had

gazed wonderingly from the hour of his birth took definite outline — a fallen hemlock upheld by a giant pine. One by one the blighted limbs were perishing. Only the pine held green, waving its plumed branches in the wind proudly.

The cow swam close beside, deeply submerged, her outstretched narrow head breaking up the smooth surface of the lagoon into far-reaching circles.

The calf tried to look round at the home he was leaving, only to find that any out-of-the-way feat was as yet beyond his skill. He lost his balance, and, plunging heavily, was submerged long enough to fill his nose and ears with water.

A beautiful magpie-plumaged golden-eye, one of the most exquisite birds that swim, rose from the water just ahead, his wings rustling musically. From a hole in an over-hanging tree his mate looked out apprehensively, the white patch under her eye showing up against the dark background. Then, frightened by the snorts and puffings of the amateur swimmer below, the bird left her nest with a lightning turn, flickering, restless as a petrel, diving, swimming. Busiest of birds, golden-eyes, who have long solved the mystery of perpetual motion.

At last! His hoofs struck ground, and levering himself up the alder-grown bank, the calf stood dripping and triumphant.

A world of green forest aisles opened up, deep, mysterious, and inviting, with the fitful slanting sunlight falling athwart the eerie spaces. Here and there through the shadows the silver riband of the river gleamed. From somewhere above the arch of the trees came the half-laughing cry of a kestrel, and down the dark avenues the wind murmured and rustled through the plumed heads of the tall moose grass growing at the margin of the stream.

They moved off along the river bank, down a sunken bear trail, where generations of bears had wandered up and down in quest of the salmon, which teem at spawning time in most Alaskan rivers. Even now skeletons of last year's fish lay thickly strewn about the banks, or in eddies of deep pools, into which the melting snow had cast them.

The calf watched his mother with admiration. Sometimes she walked carelessly, heedless of the noise she made; but when she willed it, the coarse undergrowth, springing up in patches, held buoyant beneath the weight of her unwieldy form, instead

of going off with the resounding, betraying snaps which followed on his passing. Her long and sharply-pointed hoofs were just like his, their laterals just as loosely attached, if they had anything to do with it. Why could he not walk so silently, with the same speed and swing and easy grace? He tried to imitate the mechanical measure of her tread for a while, but his young limbs refused to answer the fretting strain, and, with a bound and a sideway spring, he took the next obstacle—a thickly-growing salmon-berry bush—in his stride. What matter how he walked, so that he walked? It was a beautiful world, and he was alive, he was alive!

A confused sense of tainted air struck on the calf's sniffing nostrils, a strong, evil aroma which hung round the bushes and drifted on the breeze; but the cow held on calmly, passing over a human-looking track, some eight inches or so across, the trail of a large-footed bear, quite recent, damp, and oozy.

A lurking, ponderous form skulked ahead, now curving off into the alders, which, owing to his weight, the huge beast pressed aside as though they were rushes, now keeping to the bush path.

He seemed in no hurry, and paused sometimes to listen, lifting his massive head as he sniffed the breeze for a hint of danger.

The calf stood transfixed. There before them stood an animal who must surely be the most gigantic in the world! Beside this mammoth the moose cow, who had hitherto appeared so enormous, was but a mosquito! Ought they not to rush away, to put the bush between them?

But the cow was intent on sampling the grasses growing higher than the tangled bracken. What was a brown bear to her at the moment?

Rising up suddenly, active as a kitten, the bear supported himself against a birch-tree, leaning his broad back against it nonchalantly. Ever and again he stretched his neck and snapped a bit out of the silver bark by turning his head sideways adroitly.

It was a game, perhaps, a game bears played.

Up the tree to an almost incredible height were recent scars, but none trenched on the new marks in process of making, lofty intimations that unless a larger bear came along—a colossus who could inscribe his autograph at a still greater altitude—it would be well for such a one to move on to another corner of the wilderness.

Just for a moment the bear's round-pupilled, amiable eyes, belying an unusually aggressive appearance, caused by the curious puckering of a badly healed facial battle scar, rested on the intruders. Then, with lofty indifference, as though to show what he really could accomplish if he tried hard, he bit the tree energetically again, touching a height this time of quite eight and half feet from the ground.

Desisting from his tree-blazing operations, the bear came down to his feet heavily, and browsed, like a great ox, on the herbage about him, eating downwards, not up, like the moose cow. His late summer coat was long in parts, patchy and short in others, an inferior covering for so grand a beast. Moving slowly after the grass, he passed into the shadows, grumbling to himself.

A week of wonderful happenings followed, of introductions to hitherto only heard of beasts and things, to habits which later became part of life itself.

At the first sign of dawn they fed until the sun got up, the little one trying to imitate as best he could the cow's clever manipulation of overhead branches which she straddled dexterously with her

fore-legs, and bent down until the succulent topmost stems came within reach—a very delightful game to one who as yet depended mainly on his mother for maintenance. What matter if he never reached the flowering tops at all! Then to sleep a little, or ruminate.

In the late morning the search for junipers, moose grass, and low-growing willows, began afresh. Dusk saw them seeking beds, often the same beds, in warm, thickly-growing coverts or belts of bracken.

The calf knew enough now to lie down with his apology for a tail to windward, in order to give his acute sense of hearing and smelling a chance. His eyes could be trusted to warn him of danger threatening from leeward. A strange, impelling instinct, too, a force he could no more resist than he could fly, bade him make a short turn and sleep below the wind of his last travelled-over track in order that an enemy following it up was practically certain to be sniffed out. He also learnt the cunning trick of running down wind when going off startled, so that unless an experienced tracker was after him stalking would be difficult.

The bush at night! The most eerie thing in

the world, with strange, soft, furtive rustlings in the undergrowth as the nocturnal hunters passed through; the creaking of the trees in the wind, the sudden crash to earth of rotten boughs, and the harsh, prolonged screech of some predatory night-flier.

Too-whoo-op!

A ghostly-winged presence with luminous lamp-like eyes, swept low to ground, touching the calf as he lay.

Too-whoo-op!

Whinnying, the terrified young moose sprang up and fled to his mother's side, snuggling close, happy in his belief in her invincibility. Eagle-owls were nothing to him when safeguarded thus. He had an idea that the cow was invulnerable—nothing could harm her.

And, indeed, her immense indifference to danger fostered the notion. Not exactly indifference, for she saw after herself to a certain extent; but compared with the alertness of African antelopes, with their outposts and sentinels, their plans for escape and protective schemes, the inhabitants of Alaskan forests appear absolutely lethargic. Of course, on the constant watchfulness of the antelopes of Africa

depend their every hour of life, menaced as they are on all sides by beasts of prey. The moose had nothing to fear from any animal save man. Her region was little hunted, therefore she moved carelessly.

Holding up a snowy-tipped tail as a danger signal, a white-banded, black-patched, glossy skunk minced by confidingly on plantigrade feet. Though so small—hardly so big as a rabbit—he travelled as he listed, secure in the knowledge that with his warning coloration and notorious character, foolish indeed would be the creature who contested the right-of-way. His nightly hunting over, he was going home, full fed, to a hollow in a stony upcrop near the river.

A wolverine next, glutton of the bush, shadiest of criminals.

"A malicious beast!" the moose cow called him. "Wicked as he is clever, and sagacious and cunning beyond all other of the wilderness people."

He lived in the ex-home of a bear near by, and no sound heralded his coming—such thickly haired soles made for silence. Something like a bear he was, too, a bear-cub provided with a thick, bushy

tail. Wide-eyed, the wolverine gazed about him curiously.

Presently the calf knew them all, could pick out their individual tracks in the most difficult or ground, and tell to a nicety by the hanging scent which of the bush people had passed along, and how many hours ago.

By the lower reaches of the river the cow spent the summer days, with two charges now, for the youngster of last season had joined her in some mysterious fashion. At least it seemed mysterious to the calf as he thought of the forests, so wide, so vast, so apparently endless. How should a young moose know the way through its heart? Yet with nothing to tell him, nothing to guide him, the yearling had found his mother. It was very wonderful, very extraordinary, but the cow said all widely separated creatures who love each other have the instinct.

The one-year-old was proportionately little bigger than his brother, who grew apace, and showed by the contour of him and the loose swing of his growing limbs how big a beast he would eventually become. They were great friends, sleeping close together, feeding from the

same saplings, drinking at the same pool, though the little one took the lead in everything, and the yearling appeared to recognize that here was a leader wiser than himself. But for the terrible moose flies life went very well.

Mid-July was marked by the run of the salmon, who sought the lake in the distant hills far beyond the lagoon. King salmon, whose colour, though dark when living in the sea a thousand miles away, had changed to prismatic red-silver.

Overhead the birds of prey wheeled and circled, scenting the banquet: bald-headed eagles and hawks, ravens in dusky flocks, and big bears body-snatched in the reaches and shallows. All the air vibrated with the soft hum as of a quickly rushing river passing over loose stones, the noise made by the thousands upon thousands of glittering and perfectly proportioned fish pressing up-stream with deep-set purpose.

Over the shallows at the edge of the lagoon the salmon launched themselves, to be stranded in the riffles momentarily, or hung up permanently sometimes, an unending stream of silver-red, layers on layers of fish, flank to flank, head to tail, packed tight as sardines in a tin.

In shallow water they put on a spurt and travelled at a great rate, with the object of obviating the danger of being stranded, urged to discretion at sight of the river banks strewn with the bodies of stragglers pressed out of the water by sheer weight of the multitudes forcing on ruthlessly from behind.

The salmon never jumped, only their fins and backs and noses showed above the surface of the stream. So far as the eye could reach was the endless procession, the last in which the strenuous salmon would ever march. Not one of the mighty army would ever return to the sea! What is Nature's reason for such wastage? She always has a reason. How in face of such mortality can the yearly supply keep up? It never fails.

It was harvest-time for the big brown bears, and all along the banks their tracks criss-crossed and intersected. Even the smaller black brother, leaving his mice, his frogs, his ants, and roots, took part in the fishing, as the short impress of his hind-feet betrayed.

Here, remote from the haunts of natives, the four-footed fishermen had little to fear, and,

undeterred by dread of human attack, hunted the clock half-round.

Sometimes they gorged on old salmon, preferring their game high; other days they fished assiduously waist-deep, facing down-stream, and pouncing, needle-clawed, on their victims, which were always carried to a screen of bushes or grass for devouring. Then, leaving the crunched heads, tail-tips, and intestines, for the undertaker beetles, the bears fished again.

At a curve of the river two bears played into each other's paws with the skill and adroitness of human hunters. The female stood shoulder deep in the centre of the stream, simulating a rock and barring the way, diverting the press of fish from their straight course into the claws of the male bear, who gleaned the harvest in the shallows.

For a month the run lasted. Even at its end the bears, well fattened up for the long fast ahead, did well enough on the hundreds of rotting salmon lying on the river banks, and, later, on the remnants of the piscine army who came back in twos and threes, strong swimmers no longer, but dying and dead, colourless and splotched with white, glorious no more.

It was August now. Everywhere the pea-vine, run riot, hung out its blue and purple arras. In grim Alaska summer is like a magician who changes, as with a wand of gold, the harsh surface of the earth to paradise. Every yard of the soft marshes near the river brimmed over with flowers: a blaze of narcissus buttercups made a carpet of glowing colour; the blue of the polemonium and the bluer forget-me-not commingled; gentle breezes wafted the fragrance of this wealth of scented flora. Clouded yellow butterflies fluttered hither and thither; ariel-winged fritillaries, too, like white blossoms blown by the wind.

The squirrels began storing pine-nuts in the little hill-side colonies, and strong broods of fowl-grouse and ptarmigan picked a living among the scrub bushes.

Rambling down a lonely track, the moose calf strode right into the midst of a fluffy band of cheeping yellow chickens, crushing one flat beneath his careless splay hoof. To the right and left the survivors scattered, and at his murderous hoof came the gallant little hen, making a reconnaissance in force until the helpless chickens found safety, her tiny eyes aflame, feathers ruffled, hissing

defiance. Again and again she returned to the attack, pecking the coarse-haired fetlocks, screaming in furious chuckles her commands to begone. Her tactics, though so obvious and on so small a scale, reminded the calf of his mother, from whom he had roamed too far. Were all mothers like this, he wondered, so courageous, so forgetful of self, and faithful unto death ?

He turned to go back, looking at the crushed atom regretfully—his first hint of death.

Cheep ! Cheep ! Turning his head, he caught a glimpse of a sanctuary of cover, something like his own well-remembered sanctuary on the island, and within his tiny enemy collected her chickens beneath sheltering wings.

Curiously, in all his few weeks of wandering, the calf had not met another fully-grown specimen of his kind. He heard the noise of their careless passing often, the odd, unforgettable clacking of their hoofs, their deep chest grunts, and the crash of displaced bushes, as a great beast went off at a tearing pace, but always a barring belt of trees or thickly growing devil's-club stood between.

In the soft hush of a perfect afternoon the looked-for vision materialized. The moose had sought the

river in order to evade the attacks of the persistent moose flies, small black atoms, with venomous bites, and were standing deep in a pool churned to mud by the constant delving of the cow among the lily roots, when the wind brought an untoward scent. What it was and where it came from they never knew, but it brought them out of the water hot-foot.

Between the sombre hemlocks they glided swiftly, their usual shambling walk changed to a lurching trot. Suddenly the cow, leading, pulled up short, colliding with the yearling following close upon her heels. The calf, a few yards behind, turning from a trail into the cover, looked ahead inquisitively.

A prehistoric-looking monster blocked the centre of the bush track, carrying his short neck horizontally, lower than his elevated withers, a massive beast, like but unlike the cow moose. Something of her build there was about him, but beside this bulk she seemed a small thing indeed. A head of great narrowness and length terminated in the familiar overhanging muzzle; small eyes looked out from well-known sunken depths; but the unexplainable something the moose cow lacked was there in all its glory. Antlers! enormous and

basin-like, which projected widespread at either side of the immense head, at right angles to the middle line of the forehead. Soft and useless, pulsing with life though they were, still the mighty coronal had attained its full dimensions. Covered with a soft hairy skin, a ring of bony matter was setting in just above the base of each antler, a deposit which would presently restrict the blood-supply, and turn the spongy mass to horn.

Standing there in his royal pride, he seemed to epitomize the breath and beauty of the wild. Never had the calf thought to see such a beast !

A trifle over six and a half feet at the withers, the bull must have scaled quite a thousand pounds. From his throat swung a bell, or tassel, of long, shaded coarse hair, which, as the moose was in his prime, added to an appearance as grotesquely peculiar as it was magnificent.

The calf approached the apparition gingerly, with respect in his eyes. Not so the cow, who, deviating from her way, would have passed without a greeting. Down her spine her coat on-ended curiously, and she grunted in deep notes of annoyance.

Holding his head carefully, as though concerned

for his tender antlers, the bull advanced in a series of playful jerks, sniffing. Then he sidled backwards, only to run forward as close to the cow as he dared. It was in one of these careless movements that the calf realized that, seen sideways, his hero had a cadaverous appearance, for all his weight. Such horns as his had not been grown on nothing. The strain had been heavy, and it had told.

The cow rose on hind-legs and struck forward viciously, catching her admirer low on the shoulder, with razor hoof, an intimation not to be misunderstood. She required no company, would have none. And the big moose, with a gaping slash to remind him of the encounter, turned off down an open path, carrying his beautiful head gingerly.

The calf was thinking of the fleeting apparition as he lay in a mossy hollow into which the wind had driven the bracken of years, and seemed to see it still, so wild-looking, so grand, so strong.

A splitting reverberation rang overhead. Again and again it came, waking the forest echoes. Trembling, the three beasts pulled together, standing awhile as the cow thought out the means of escape. Their position was untenable indeed. In

case of a surprise they would all be caught and shot down in this hollow, unclimbable on three sides. Going off at a great pace, they ran into thick timber, negotiating it after the marvellous manner of moose, feeling the air as they went.

Where four game paths linked up a huge bear stood, a disturbing spirit, with eyes oblique with fury. He did not seem to see the deer, but the calf recognized at a glance the puckered face, more drawn now than ever. The blazer of the tree! In deep trouble and distress, the stupidest of the bush people could tell that.

Suddenly he rose on hind-feet, towering above the scrub-bushes about him, and with quivering arms struck the air with weighty blows, a Samson shorn of his strength. Down his chest a thin bead of blood trickled dully. Then, with a groan wrung from the depths of him, the bear turned viciously on a fine birch growing some feet away and scored the bark into a dozen furrows. Again and again the stricken creature wreaked revenge with fierce, driving claws, and so tremendous was the onslaught that the tree, though a big one, shook to its roots.

The calf fled the place, leading, always leading. Terror lent him a speed his mother could not

surpass. The terrible crash, the bear with the wild tragic eyes, they had something to do with each other, and that something was an unknown and fearful element which must be avoided.

They ran for ten miles without breaking, a big run for even a full-grown moose.

The forest stood between them and destroyers.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH OF THE MOOSE COW

"Which is he that killed the deer?"
As You Like It.

"Poor deer, thou mak'st a testament
As worldlings do."
As You Like It.

In the bed of a once swiftly rushing stream, dried up by a fall of rock from an overhanging granite upcrop which had deflected the flow of water, the moose sauntered slowly, picking the tops from the ripening salmon-berry bushes.

A small brown bird fluttered about their feet, snapping up the insects turned up from the moist earth; rising sometimes with a blithe air of abandon, to settle again a moment later. He had a slender song, with few notes in it, but very alluring and joyous. Metallic blue-jays chattered in the pines, a white butterfly flaunted across the way, and below a spray of budding pea-vine an exquisite rufous humming-bird flickered like a

bead of flame. On a heap of rotting leaves a porcupine lay for dead, and now and again the peremptory tap-tap-tapping of a woodpecker drowned the small sounds of the softly squelching hoofs.

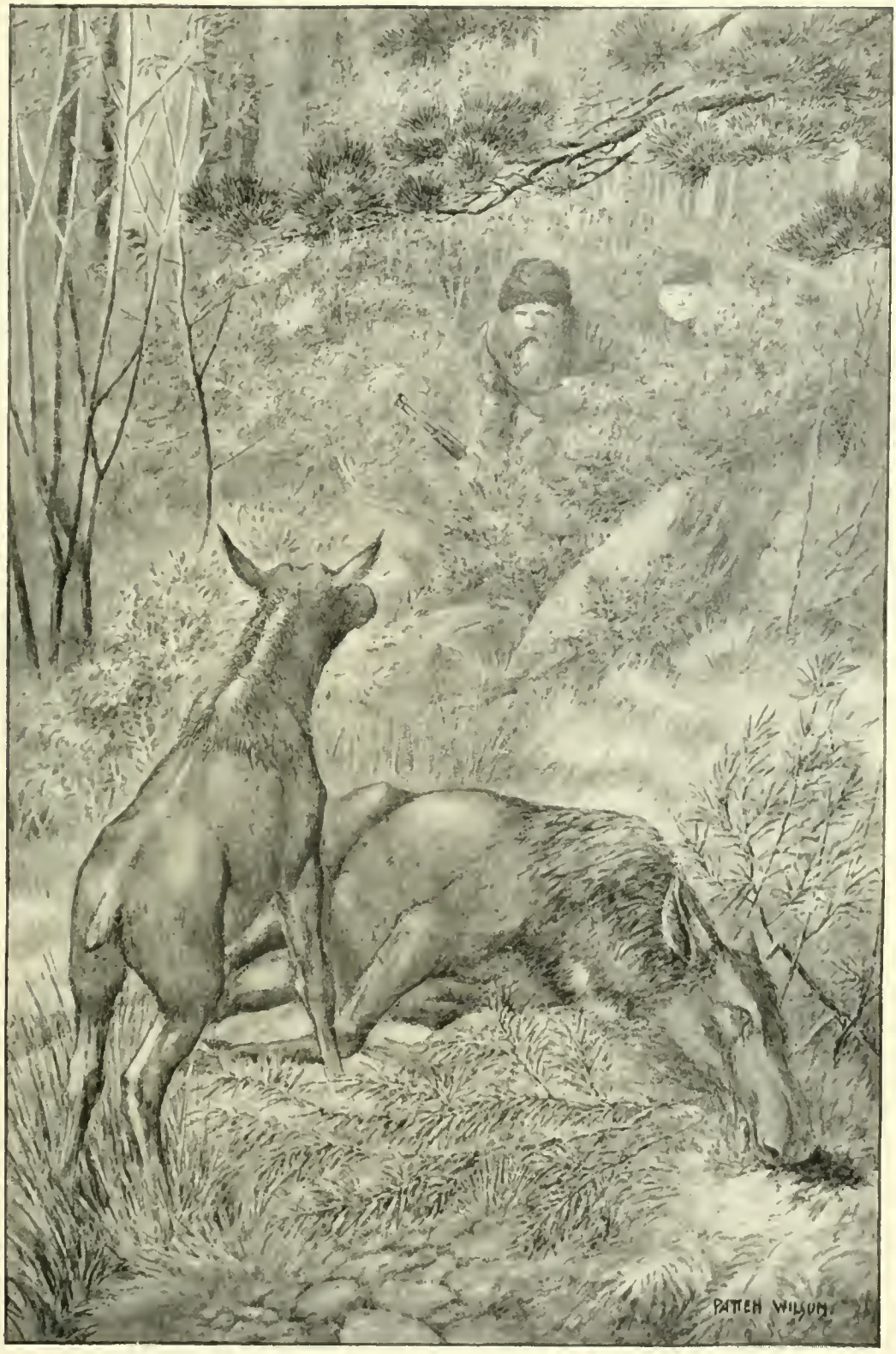
The density of the bordering bush tangle lightened a little, and the moss hanging in swaying festoons across the path of the woods flung long shadows on the secret lawns made for the dancing feet of light-limbed satyrs. Sweet-burdened winds, full of the incense of summer, carried a message upwards to the snow tiers.

Suddenly the cow stopped, paralyzed with terror, facing a clump of interlacing junipers, her limbs rigid, her stiffened legs immovable. The scent of a human being, so frightening to all the deer tribe, had reached her nostrils.

Bang!

She dropped in her tracks, struggled up again gamely, and tried to turn. A few lurching steps, and another bullet got her behind the shoulder. Her nose touched earth, and she fell to rise no more.

The yearling and the calf, in sympathetic wonderment, pulled together for the fraction of



HIS MOTHER'S DEATH

a moment, their panting sides touching, chaotically meditating escape, until the larger beast, hesitating no longer, broke back, and went down the bed of the stream at the gallop.

From the cover a tatterdemalion figure issued, and stood leaning on his rifle looking down at his victim complacently. Ample meat lay there, and meat of all things was what the prospector most desired. More than the not-to-be-discovered gold it was just then. Gold means very little in the wilderness when you are hungry. Nature never meant gold to make happiness. That's why so many people love her. Unnatural civilization has done it, and the worst of it is most of us have to be civilized, whether we like it or not!

A red-grey mane of hair fell to the big man's shoulders, a wavy beard to his waist, and in the interregnum, between it and the top of his trousers, was a band of leather stuck full of cartridges. When the breeze blew the wavy beard aside, a lump of Cassiar gold was exposed, doing duty as a tie-pin in a dirty white scarf.

The calf stood bewildered, hardly feeling alive. The shock of his mother's death, which, indeed, he but dimly understood, had paralyzed his reason—

he was unable to take in just what had happened. His beautiful mother lay there, her eyes fast glazing, and did not answer his call. Presently he advanced a little, with one eye on the unknown hideous animal who watched things so closely, and stood with his splay feet in a faint trickle of blood, waiting for the cow to get up.

Something was cast at him which tightened round his limbs and threw him down. He fell heavily, hurting his knees on the stones. But for this unexpected onslaught he might have looked on the red-haired man differently—he was such a friendly little beast, and desirous of keeping on good terms with all. But as the struggle brought the two close together the youngster saw in the eyes of his captor the ruthless gleam of pursuit which is part of the great scheme, and before which the weak must go under. He knew then that resistance was unavailing, knew it even as he plunged with legs tied together until the ground was ploughed up into furrows all about him. Useless! The roping was stronger than his meagre powers. He lay vanquished.

Another two-legged being dropped from nowhere, a yellow one this time, with tiny slit eyes, and no

hair at all save for a long black pigtail twisted about his shiny head like a cap. A cunning, leering, pock-marked creature, carrying a knife between his teeth. Prodding the calf in the ribs with sharply-pointed clawy nails, he spoke in a high, thin treble, quite unlike any sound the moose had ever heard in the forest before. It was so thin, so ugly, harsh, and rasping.

"What for you catchee him alive? You savvy me wantee meat. You no wantee him die all same cow?"

"Nope!" said the red-haired man. "I'll take him to the trading post for Sadie. Will she be glad to have him? Wal, I should smile!"

The calf lay huddled as he fell, and in no way realized it was his mother they were dismembering. Somehow he only thought of her in one way, as the most vital and stirring of spirits, so peculiarly alive that it would be impossible to snuff her out. Therefore he watched the hauling away of gruesome odds and ends of moose meat dispassionately.

It came to his turn to be lifted on to the improvised sledge of logs, and hauled over stones and between trees to an untidy clearing, littered with

empty cans and camp débris of all kinds. Once or twice a terrific jolt wellnigh dislodged the calf altogether, and then the Chinaman, none too gently, flung him back.

The men cooked a meal in a filthy pan over a smoky, hastily raked together smouldering fire—moose liver, fresh killed, and the inevitable beans.

Lying on his rough bed, the calf slept heavily; he was so weary and distressed and youthful. The gods everywhere are merciful to the young, and give them, because they love them, sleep.

He wakened with a nerve-shaking start, to find himself an unwilling participator in a swift meteoric rush down-stream in a flat-bottomed boat, whose bows he shared with a pair of dogs, half-malamute, half-wolf, "inside dogs," as they are called when bred in the country, creatures who could not bark, but only howled more drearily than the wolves they so closely resembled. Bidden to leave the young moose alone, they did so under protest, showing their teeth and laying back their wolfish ears threateningly as the prisoner shifted his tied feet ever so slightly, or stretched his cramped neck on the rough gunwale.

At nights the party landed and camped by the

river, when the calf, with a hobble of strong rope attached to his right fore-leg and his back left, was permitted to browse among the alders and low-growing cotton woods, the while the men foraged round for anything they could shoot in the way of waterfowl for the pot. What was left of the carcass of the cow was not further trenched upon. Exposed to the rarified air, with its touch of frost, the flesh was undergoing the initial process of "jerking," or drying, in readiness for winter shortage.

At first the calf would not eat, his intense longing for freedom and his mother set up a kind of nausea which turned him from feeding. The dogs, too, filled him with terror, so that he hardly dared move. Then keen hunger made him forget all save that he must ease the gnawing and ever-present pain which gave him such acute physical discomfort. On the second evening he fed to all appearances contentedly enough. Sometimes as he attempted to straddle the bushes in order to bring down some tempting flowering top within reach of his muzzle, he forgot he was a prisoner, and that he would never roam the forest again, its free burgher. Then the sight of the camp fire and

the curious smell of meat cooking brought him back to the hideous reality.

They had no really hairbreadth escapes, no battling amid rapids, no running into rocks, and only once came within an ace of disaster as the light boat flashed through a thickly timbered valley, where the river channel ran through a rocky cañon, across which the overhanging trees twined arresting arms. Nothing but lying flat in the bottom of the boat saved its human occupants from being swept off into the stream, running like a mill-race. Here the tight ropings proved the salvation of the moose. He could not have moved had he tried.

One evening a band of eight Indians, out after caribou in the barrens below the foothills, lured by the light of the fire, dropped into camp. Born trackers as they were, a moose taken alive possessed an interest a dead specimen could never evoke. With odd clickings of their tongues and solemn head waggings, they prodded the trembling calf to his feet with the muzzle end of a prehistoric Winchester. His legs, cramped now by the constant irk of the rope, refused to hold him, and with a pitiful little sigh he sank to the ground once more. A thwack from an elastic alder brought

him up again. Just for a moment his startled eyes met those of his persecutors, and in their depths he saw mirrored the same light that had made the moose cow's eyes so beautiful; the bear's eyes had it too, the wolverine's, and the skunk's—all the wilderness people. It spoke of freedom. They were free as the birds, these wild red men of the woods, and yet they baited him—a prisoner!

"Quit!" said a curt, drawling voice from behind. "And git, every man of yer!"

The tormentors passed, as did the hours which seemed days, all very cold, very bleak, very much alike, until at last a make-believe civilization was reached—civilization—and Sadie!

She came to greet him, rushing excitedly out of her log shanty, with its two sleeping bunks ranged against the walls, its small stove, and a bench crammed with blankets and trade goods for barter with the Indians, and stroked his coat, and told him as he shrank away that he must not be frightened, for she would make him happier than he had ever been, that he had come to be her companion in the loneliness. But this last she whispered in his big ear, lest any other should catch the confidence.

He was taken to a small corral, churned into

quagmire by the vigorous rootings of a bear cub. The moose did not like the look of his companion at all, and, with his hobble removed, retreated to a corner, where he stood dejectedly looking out to the pines, standing like sentinels against the sky. Overhead the geese flew in wedge-shaped skein, and as they came, their wings beating the air in rhythmical strokes, the whole concourse honked on a hoarse, deep note, curiously penetrating, an epitome of solitude, the call of the wild itself. Later, the vibrant whir of myriad ducks migrating to warmer countries made the calf look up. "Summer has passed! Summer has passed!" sang in the musical rustle. It was true. The young deer felt it in his bones. Summer had passed, and with it freedom!

He was christened "Moosewa," as the Cree Indians of Sadie's native Canada would have called him. Moosewa, Cree talk for wood-eater. And very soon the growing calf understood and liked his name, hearing in it something worth answering, something wild, and strange, and true. Moosewa! It had a thrill in its sound like the creak of the wind in the pine-tops. Moosewa! Moosewa!

The trading-post, a long-established centre, con-

sisted of a heterogeneous collection of empty tin cans, surrounding half a dozen wooden shacks, one more pretentious than the rest being the saloon and only store for hundreds of miles—headquarters, too, of the trappers of the district, who unmurmuringly added to the trader's profit of 40 per cent. on the pelts by investing the hardly-earned purchase-money in whisky and goods supplied at a larger percentage still.

The trappers had long since left for the hunting-grounds, and the dreary trading-post, saved from the bush which crowded it on every side, lay desolate and gaunt. Above the trees, half a mile away, a thin spiral of smoke ascended from an Indian settlement, to which the most ordinary sense of smell would guide anyone from a great distance. Stumps of trees lay about everywhere, ceasing only as they met the standing pines, which hung over the last of the six log shacks—a tumble-down cabin proclaimed by a printed board as a Real Estate Office! A little apart, as though to mark class difference, two Chinamen lived in an unwanted shanty, and scratched a living by washing for gold in a creek long since abandoned by the white man.

It was the antithesis of the moose calf's world,

and the sight of the cribbed, confined space hurt him like a blow. To live here! Penned up with a bear cub who had never known what freedom meant!

His arrival made quite a stir, and through the interstices of the fence the moose watched the life of the place, bare and frugal and sombre, with few graces on the surface and none beneath. At first everyone contributed to his food-supply, hanging the offerings on the topmost bars of the prison walls.

The little black bear fought stubbornly for his place in the world, claiming, with the pathetic force of back-handed cuffs and protesting snaps, equal shares with the new-comer, who claimed none, in the portion of boiled dried salmon served out by Sadie, who had long since tired of her bear pet. Indeed, with his powers of climbing he was free to return to the wild an' he listed; but he had eaten of the bread of dependence and drunken of the wine of ease too long! A land of plenty held him securely as a den in the Zoo. Next winter he would probably furnish a muff for the hands now feeding him.

He had come from a rocky snow-covered cave,

where the old she-bear had holed up for the winter. She had denned early, owing to weather conditions, unwitting that the spot selected for her long drowse was well known to the settlement, who marked it down to a man. At the right time, led by a trapper of experience, a small party induced the bear to come forth and meet her end at the muzzle of a ready rifle. Inside the cave were two cubs, of which the smaller died at once for lack of the Swiss milk Sadie could hardly afford for one.

Wise beyond his years, the cub commenced nosing round the corral looking for a place in which to hole up as soon as the nights grew colder, regardless of the fact that the little space offered no shelter or dens at all. A pile of leafless scrub bushes cast in for Moosewa's use attracted him, and therein the fat bear secreted himself, and after the first fall of snow slept serenely, betraying his presence by a thin jet of steam, which arose from a tiny yellowish hole in the centre of the rounded sanctuary. As this melted to larger proportions under the influence of the deep breather within, more snow came down, and yet another fall, until at last, heavily covered, Bruin's hibernating place ceased to be noticeable.

Real winter came in with November, inaugurated by huge snow-flakes, which fell to the depth of three feet in a single day, a condition of things baffling to the young moose, whose first experience of Alaskan climatic extremes it was. He had no shelter, either, such as he could have obtained in the forest under big timber, where the snow rarely penetrates, but stood exposed to the storm, turning round and round in his endeavour to hide away from its fury. By night the banked snow hid him from the view of the shack, until, as the blizzard showed no signs of ceasing, Sadie herself ploughed her way through the drifts to retrieve her pet from his ever-lessening corner, on which the all-engulfing snow encroached. It was no easy matter for an unsophisticated calf to get to the shack at all. In later years he knew how to make headway through deep snow by a series of well-calculated jumps, but now he floundered and fell until, somehow or other, he found himself within the log hut himself, sharing it with Sadie, and a stretched-out, red-haired something, whom Mooswa recognized as the cause of all his trouble. But for that insensate creature grasping a black bottle the moose cow would roam the forest still.

The warmth was comforting, enervating in fact, and with each fresh log thrown into the stove the moose felt more and more disinclined to face the rigours outside. In spite of the extra thick pelage with which he had been provided all in readiness for winter, he believed himself, after a night of luxury, an inside beast, a thing to be pampered. Had it been otherwise, some instinct surely would have bidden him prepare, like the bear, for emergencies!

The trader taught him his mistake, which was just as well, perhaps, refusing further hospitality, and turning the shrinking deer into the snow.

The Chinaman, bribed by a silver dollar to the rescue, and resourceful as all his race, speedily built up a shelter that served Moosewa well. He could lie far back in it, and through an opening in the logs watch the night sky lighten and dawn come. There was a scheme, too, for holding up the provender of tree-tops and brush-wood odds and ends, or bark when nothing else was to be had, at a height which suited the limitations of a short, thick neck.

Now that he had some protection, he could bear the winter better; indeed, at this season, imprison-

ment was of less importance. All things seemed to sleep. No sound of bird or beast broke the chill silence, nothing but the faint cracking of the river ice as the thermometer rose ever so little. When, at twenty degrees below zero, the moose saw frost floating in the air, he thought for a wild, foolish moment that some new type of bird had come. As an airy filament settled on his rounded nose he knew better. He was learning many things.

Around the corral a lynx track showed up one morning, curiously large impressions which defined the four toes clearly, crossed by the little furrow of a belated squirrel. Coming together they merged —merged until the squirrel trail ended.

Sometimes at night the forked spears of the Aurora glowed, contrasting its silver glory with the inky blackness of the dimly outlined peaks. Somehow its radiancy seemed part of the moose calf's lost world. On generations of his kind the Polar lights had shone through the centuries, spreading wide in even arrow shafts, until in waves of flame they died as suddenly as they had come.

As the snow rose level with the " snake " fence, an arrangement of easily moved rails which supports

itself by its zig-zag twists, the moose could have walked away quite easily. Therefore he was tied up again, leg to leg, a precaution that wellnigh broke his heart. Not to be able to stretch his limbs as he wanted, to be forced once more into a painful hobble! And the old longing surged through his veins—the wild, mad desire to be free.

When the weather moderated a little, he learnt to follow Sadie down the bush trail—the road to anywhere. His untrammelled hoofs went decorously now. He never skipped or jumped, or sought to throw the halter from his neck.

The river, still frozen, ran in its lower reaches through a wide, open valley bare of timber, intersected by numerous back lakes, from which the barrens rolled like prairie country, bare, low-lying plains, where the vegetation lay flat and dead from the effects of the heavy snow. Typical caribou ground, and sure enough one fine day the ramblers found undoubted traces of the former presence of caribou, numberless antlers lying hitherto unnoticed denoting the fact that in some less hunted era the caribou had sought this corner of the wilderness in the fall of the year.

Sometimes they put up red-combed ptarmigan,

whose plumage was one with the whitened landscape, different looking birds altogether to the mottled specimens who lived still in the yearling's recollection. And once, on a high bluff, they came on the larder of an eagle owl, wherein the frozen heads of recent kills were strewn, ptarmigan mostly, and here and there the ancient remains of ducks and snipe.

The trappers, unkempt of hair, tattered and weather-worn, had come in from the wilds with their varying bags of valuable skins. The moose calf hated each man, and for all that felt the real breath of the wilderness which blew into the post with them. One bearded stalwart could even imitate Keneu, the bald eagle, saluting the dawn, so that it was possible to believe Keneu himself screeched. Another talked to the eagle owls at night, and got answer for answer, hoot for hoot. Yet Moosewa hated these destroyers and despoilers, with their bundles of the things which had once been animate, pulseless, lifeless travesties lying on the rough floor of the saloon before the appraising eyes of the trader.

When spring really came he felt the call most, when the geese passed over, and the ducks and the

sandhill cranes went back to the northern nesting-grounds. He ran around his prison as each fresh flight renewed his pain, making odd little noises in his throat, until Sadie laughed and laughed with pleasure at what she thought were signs of his contentment and peace.

As it grew dark another skein of geese, numbering two hundred or more, flew by, so low that the moose thought he could see the colour of the leader's wings.

"It is Pishnekuh, the black goose," he said to himself, hearing in fancy the chatter of the ducks by the lagoon, and the snapping of the birch bark before the chisel teeth of the world-builders. "Pishnekuh, going North to nest."

He ceased to eat. Better death than a life dragged on in slavery. From the lure of budding spruce-tops and juicy moose grasses he turned, and lay for hours drooping in his shed, drinking sometimes, but eating not at all.

"Say, Cretney, what's amiss with my moose?" asked Sadie of a young trapper, who, with his furs disposed of at small profit to himself and considerable gain to the dealer, was lounging the day away propped up against the snake fence, smoking.

Turning skilled eyes on the wilting, hunched deer, the youth smiled, a trifle wryly.

"He's lawngen!" he answered simply, in the vernacular of his far, far distant island set in the western sea—"lawngen for home!"

And Sadie, little more than a girl, who had followed her man to this back of beyond, recking nothing then of the abyssmal loneliness, looked into the sad, sunken eyes of the yearling as though she would read the secrets of his heart.

"Are you really longing, Moosewa?" she would ask him. "I wish I knew."

Then, one day, as she saw him straining his head to watch the flickering of a squirrel on a fallen log, she understood!

Saying nothing, she passed thoughtfully into the shack, closing the door behind her.

When she was safely out of the way, for the only two windows in the primitive abode faced the "street," and not into the corral, the red-haired man took the opportunity of branding Moosewa, for no special reason, save a degenerate love of the smell of burning flesh, and the insensate feeling of omnipotence the realization of his power gave him. "Power is sweet, and when you are a little clerk

you love its sweetness quite as much as if you were an emperor, and maybe you love it a good deal more."

He had no branding-pen, but among the flotsam and jetsam left over from many occupations he retained an iron, the usual longish rod with two rusty fire-worn letters at its end—N. R., which stood for Nanoose Ranche.

How many head of cattle he had branded with the long disused sign, far down the coast-line of Vancouver Island!

Cretney, with nothing to do but kill the time between drinks—Cretney, strong as a bull and elastic as a snake, was called in to assist, and together the two men, with shouts of laughter loud enough to have warned Sadie had she been in the shack instead of at the Indian camp tending a sick child, roped the terrified young moose in all directions, and threw him down, securely tied up and practically unable to move. Cretney in a spasm of feeling suggested the hoof as a branding place, and was reminded in vigorous language that the letters on the iron stood seven inches tall. The moose was to be marked on his quarter, the only reliable branding-place. Marks on a hoof wore

out, but the mark Moosewa would carry would last whilst Moosewa lived.

Carefully the red-haired man carried the hot iron from the stove across the corral, and thumped himself down on the body of the prone deer, on whose head Cretney sat firmly.

A horrible smell of singeing, burning flesh arose, and in spite of unavailing struggles the cruel brand bit deep.

And Mooswa made no sound. Let it be counted to his everlasting credit that he made so sound.

Every turn and curve of the letters burnt and tortured—N. R. But to the poor moose they might have been the whole alphabet.

Some rough fat was smeared over the wound to keep out the cold; and there, lying in the corner just as they unroped him, the youngling lay, stunned by the sudden terror and the quivering sharpness of the ever-present pain.

Evening fell. One by one the brilliant stars came out. Sirius was shining, and Venus, beautiful a fraud as ever, lightened the dark night until the moon got up.

The moose was asleep at last, but wakened as a familiar hand put the halter tenderly about his neck.

He rose willingly, and followed obediently as ever, waiting for the slip rails to be thrown down that he might pass through to the bush track they so often walked over. Where the trail was wide enough they went side by side, Saidie and he, but sometimes she forged ahead and led the way.

Past the Indian settlement, lying asleep in the moonlight, on and on to the fringe of the sable-robed forest, and at its edge the girl stopped and removed the halter from the deer's neck, gripping him firmly still by the long hair growing on the humped shoulders.

Suddenly she dropped her hand and stood a little apart.

"You are free, Moosewa!"

He looked about in stupor; the idea of freedom was not tangible to one who had been a prisoner so long.

"You are free, Moosewa!"

He understood.

Just for a moment his quick eyes scanned the trail whereon he had so often walked, the backward path to the post—he would never tread it again! Swift as a bird he flew into the tremulous shadows, rushing through the density as only a moose can.

The thud and echo of his frenzied passing, the breaking of the bushes, came back to the girl as she stood alone.

Then all was silence.

His little-used hoofs had no feeling, and clacked uncontrollably at every step; his eyes, unaccustomed to the dim half-lights of the forest, failed him often; the sound of rushing rivers beat loud in his ears; the trembling of his limbs from cramp and long fasting held him back when he fain would go forward; the dull burn of his brand never ceased. Yet he was free!

Gone the corral, whose barring limitations broke his spirit; gone the weary, never-ending days of pacing to and fro; and the long, long stab of pain as the birds called him to the wild.

He was free!

Was not that knowledge sufficient to urge him forward without wasting sympathy or thought for the darts and prickings in his outstretched aching bones? He who had been fettered knew, as every wild bird and wanderer knows, that the one thing worth anything is freedom.

The two-legged ones should never take him alive again!

That something untoward might somewhere unexpectedly fall on him was a vague dread at first. His life in the wild had been so short and sheltered. What if there existed some unreckoned-with force with which no yearling moose could hold his own! But as he travelled farther and farther through the night into lands similar to those he had known since infancy, such unconscious joy came to him that fear passed before it, and left him with the wide, free, unconscious spirit of the explorer to whom the unknown means but the unconquered.

Crossing a swamp, he put his splay hoof through the hollow base of a half-submerged tree-stump and disturbed an otter. Like lightning the flexuous body shot out, and in the dim half-light of dawn Moosewa caught a flashing glimpse of a bull-dog head, bristling whiskers, and small black eyes, glistening like dewdrops in a spider's web.

He knew the look of daybreak. That the human ones could not imprison, and it had come to him in his small corral just as surely as it came now in the wide wilderness.

But—how differently!

Everywhere the close Alaskan fog hung about the forest, blending the trees with the sky, lurking

spectrally behind the pines, wreathing its transparencies over the river, clinging to the young deer's coat like dew.

Myriads of tiny red spiders were entangled in the moisture, and all the atmosphere was thick with the venturesome little aeronauts, hanging apparently from fragile single threads beginning and ending Heaven knows where, all intermixed with each other's films of silk.

Some of the minute spiders sailed away on their silken wires like woodland fairies, other enterprising spirits investigated the moose thoroughly, running about his back, over his quarters, and then on the endless threads down his legs to the ground. Even then they did not settle, but skimmed over the surface of the grass lightly until the gossamer filaments took them high in the air again.

The wonders of the Northern forest are countless, but there is a chill solemnity about them which is absent from the woods of sunnier countries. Skeletons of trees decayed to the heart, holding out dead limbs to the sky, turn the deep tangles to a charnel-house. Everlasting dead trees adumbrate the spirits; it becomes depressing to be perpetually overshadowed by the presence of death.

The young moose was not depressed, rejoicing as he was in his new-found freedom. And all day long the stealthy movements of the bush people kept the solitudes alive. Though not so much as a glint of their eyes could be seen, the calf knew they were there, the mercurial ones, passing to and fro.

As the sun gained power the mists tiptoed away, passing lightly down the forest aisles, clinging to the spruce-tops as though loath to go.

To be in the Alaskan forest as day begins is to feel all the nameless, mysterious, witching attraction of the unknown mute forces of life. The clean, sweet smell of the vast wilderness; the resinous scent of the pines; the braided grasses murmuring a gentle lullaby; the rush of the swollen river channelling its long journey to the sea; the desire to see the other side of each hollow and fallen trunk—is all part of the irresistible glamour which lures a vagrant farer to pause awhile.

Abundance of water there was, budding lily-roots, moose grass, and succulent bushes, and great trees to form a barrier against the ice-touched winds sweeping down from the guardian snow-clad peaks, above whose towering pinnacles the eagles wheeled.

CHAPTER V

THE WANDERER

"Moody-mad and desperate stags."
Henry VI.

The summer of his regained freedom was the warmest and most beautiful of all the yearling's life. No other gave such soft, mild days, such calm, bright nights. Nature herself worked for her well-being, and bade the elements be kind.

He wandered always, even in regions where food was plentiful and a wealth of tempting bushes lay to a curling tongue. Ever at the back of his mind was the thought of the lagoon and the island. If he could find the island, there, surely, would be safety and peace.

Dawdling down a newly-made moose trail one early morning, he passed some whitened bones lying at the base of a shaft of granite. He looked at them idly, connecting them not at all with his enemies of the trading-post. And yet the bleached

remains were those of no Aleut, Indian, or member of the countless other tribes, but of a white man fallen by the way, a lonely trapper overtaken by the cold of the winter solitudes wherein he hunted. The forest had been his sepulchre these many months. Something more tangible scared the moose a moment later—the former shelter, one of many dotted about the district, of the long-dead trapper, a tiny shack of pine-logs laboriously put together. It stood in its lonely clearing looking so out of place—man's handiwork—in a region in which every element of wild nature reigned supreme.

It alarmed Moosewa terribly, with its likeness to the "homes" of the trading-post. Almost he could think himself a prisoner once more, almost could he hear, instead of the music of the river and the song of the wind through the trees, the unforgettable sounds of a human settlement awaking to the work of day.

Some meat-hunting Indians finished it! They almost got him as he crossed a morass bare of trees, where nothing but bog-myrtle and tundra grew.

The sudden snapping of a trig gave him warning! Seldom does a wild animal break a twig when

moving at leisure through the forest—a fact all the more remarkable when the enormous weight of such beasts as moose and bears is considered. Going off, startled, a moose crashes through all obstacles anyhow, but given his own time he can pass through the thickest cover silently as a panther.

The young moose did not stay to investigate what sort of an enemy was afoot, but with a finesse worthy of a beast three times his age made straight for the dense cover farthest from the spot whence the sudden crack had proceeded. A bullet pinged by his ear, taking out a strip of it neatly; another grazed his hock.

The encounter drove him in an access of unreasoning fear through the forest to the uplands, to unmoose-like regions which led, after hours of restless trekking, to the barrens at the foot of the mountains. So long as the food-supply held out he enjoyed the adventure. It was something to have reached an apparently unhunted corner of the wild, to be journeying in parts unknown to any other of his tribe. These slopes leading to the divide above the Sushitna River belonged to the caribou. Their shed antlers told him so, even if

the supply of lichen and mosses growing on the tundras did not.

But for the foxes and the marmots, the explorer's way was very lonely. The foxes did not fear the strange new-comer in the least, and ran about their earths on the honeycombed hillsides like rabbits playing in a burrow.

Walking slowly in his own peculiar, meditative, slouching gait, into more and more exquisite scenes, sleeping o' nights at altitudes to which no aspiring moose had ever before ascended, the yearling began to wonder whether his adventurous turn of mind had not landed him into a position which, sooner or later, must prove too much for his mountaineering powers. He had qualms as to whether his feet were formed for this sort of thing. The stones hurt them cruelly, and he slipped often. The bushes, too, showed signs of giving out. What if he were presently faced with nothing but acres of the thickly growing lichen his neck was much too short to crop !

A tortuous purple-black gorge, whose walls at times almost excluded the light, led on to a shining glacier streaming down the mountain-side.

The moose had never seen a glacier at such close

quarters before; its shimmering opalescence reminded him of the Aurora's glow. He was afraid of it as it lay, broad and sinister, in the enfolding mists. In those icy hummocks lived the spirit Nunataks. He was very much afraid indeed.

He stood, a lonely bulk in the desolate landscape, looking up at the panorama outspread before him, his soft coat changed now to a coarser covering, and little, soft, cushioned spikes showing above the thick hair either side of his forehead. Hardly noticeable spikes as yet—just a hint of the antlers to be.

The glacier, a small one, descended to valley level, to the yearling's own country, an iridescent way, gleaming prismatically. For a few yards down its length the edges dripped water, and towards its centre the snowy stream was softened by the action of accumulated moisture beneath. Lifting his neck to the overhanging pinnacles and fairy palaces, lit by a hundred pharos-fires, the moose licked the melting mass gratefully.

As the mists tiptoed up the slopes, the hillsides showed themselves dotted over with bands of white sheep, horned creatures entirely new to Moosewa. Always residing far above the timber-line, how

should a mountain sheep be known to a denizen of the forest?

In a clatter of stones a near-by bunch of sheep bounded towards the intruder. If they saw him, they did not fear him, though the little grey sentinel marmots had long since sounded the shrill whistle of alarm. The sight of the fearless mountain sprites routed the moose as not even the lack of food and hard going could do. He would go home. Shale cliffs were not for him.

Their headlong rush reminded him of the flight of birds. The same lightness and abandon was in their impetuous action, the same marvellous equipoise, ease, and rapidity of movement. He could not watch that gloriously free downward sweep without being brought to think of the eagles soaring above the snow-peaks.

A splendid caribou crossed a valley ahead, going strong, with a harem of seven cows about him. Presently the bunch halted, pulled together, and with little tails erect, as is the way with caribou when startled, trotted towards the moose.

Circling round and round in interested amazement, with sniffing noses and extended necks, the beautiful creatures investigated the unknown.

He was a fine sight, the old caribou bull, in his own way as handsome as the bull moose, whose rugged appearance lived still in the yearling's memory. Not so heavily built, or so majestic, there was a finer, lighter beauty about him which no moose could emulate. The horns of great length, though complete, were soft and velvet-covered, and the whole effect from brow to tops was unusually symmetrical. The brow antlers matched exactly—a rare feature. The cows carried horns also — the horns the moose cow had so envied.

The caribou had no welcome for the visitor, but drove him down the slopes ruthlessly. If their horns looked soft, their deeply-cleft broad hoofs did not, and the thought of their latent force gave the moose courage to tackle the tundra slopes barring the way to the forest area.

Smooth and inviting they looked, but appearances are deceptive in tundras as in many things. The whole place was a morass, which the feet of the roving caribou alone were designed to negotiate.

Beneath the tundra the ground is for ever frozen, and only the surface thaws out each year. Bogged

for awhile a moose might be, but not inextricably deep; and the incentive of an exile's memory is very potent.

He crossed as deftly as he knew how, keeping his eyes on the forest giants tossing out their arms in beckoning welcome, seeing, long before he reached them, the still green deeps, banked with bracken and devil's cup, the boles of the birch shining like bars of silver through the gloom, and the thread of the river, up which the salmon were running once more.

With that unexpected generosity peculiar to Nature, the rarest and most beautiful of wild silhouettes was vouchsafed the wanderer. Mishe-Mokwa, the small black bear, was fishing for his supper; not with the purposeful deliberation of his big brown cousin so busily wading in the river, going with the current, after salmon, but on a simpler design of his own. He lay extended on a log lying out into a spreading backwater, and all the moose could see was the rearward of him, and the odd-looking upturned soles, with their spear-like, slightly-curving claws.

Mishe-Mokwa was catching small fish in dozens with his open paw. Thrusting his forearm dee

into the water, he patiently held it there long enough to persuade the piscine army down below that there was nothing to be afraid of. The fish gathered about the trap because the oil in the paw was an irresistible attraction. Now and again the fisherman withdrew his paw, closed on a fistful of shining silver, which he released most carefully, and ate in ones with evident enjoyment, beginning on each minute fish—so minute that one would have said the largest was beneath the notice of a bear—at the tail-end. As he neared the head he snapped it off and spat it clear away, with a little "piff" which sounded quite clearly on the silence. After each separate banquet he meditated awhile, as though calculating the heights of bliss to which he had attained ; then, with a sideway tilt to give his arm greater length, he began to fish again.

For some time the yearling watched the proceedings, so interested was he. Suddenly the bear brought up his paw from the depths with no fish in its grip, and raised his head, looking furtively from side to side, seeing nothing to alarm him, suspecting much. The wind had veered ever so little, and some scent he did not like had reached his delicately perceptive nostrils.

"Trudge, pack, and begone!" counselled the wardens of the wild.

With a shuffle he backed off his log, and on all fours went off plantigrade fashion into the dim forest.

The polish on the tree-stem and heads of fish in varying stages of decomposition betrayed the fact that this was a favourite backwater of Bruin's. Moosewa would have liked to catch the furry fisherman at work again, but he never returned. He was wary and fished elsewhere, or the ripening berries of the bounteous forest satisfied him.

For a while the young deer lived in the wooded ridges, high and wind-swept, because he had no adviser to tell him of the regions best suited to the variable conditions of the seasons. He had them practically to himself. All the bulls were now in the marshlands, where they sought, after the last of the snows, the luxuriantly growing junipers and dwarf willows. Between the high ridges and the low-lying swamps, in sheltered timbered glades, the cows and calves roamed sequestered.

Persistent autumnal rains ruffled in time the surface of his philosophy, such sweeping showers, slanting on the keen breath of the ice-touched

wind, girdling all the wild world with mists. Gradually he travelled downwards, learning many lessons on his way, most valuable of all how best to pass easily over giant fallen pines—reminders of winter's tempest—how to avoid unseen tree-stumps waiting to trip up the unwary, and how to get through stoutly-laced alder thongs grown again and overgrown, stretched for the throwing down of careless steppers.

He perfected himself in swimming, crossing the widest streams and lakes persistently, and taught himself how to thread his way among slippery rocks, polished to ebony by the rushing, swirling waters of all the centuries.

Once as he waded through a swiftly rushing tributary streamlet of melting snow, not deep enough to swim, and dangerous because of its submerged boulders, he was almost carried away, and becoming frightened as he stumbled and foundered, gained a small black boulder, on which he stood for a space poised, four feet together, like a gigantic klipspringer. He tried not to look down into the swirling whiteness, where black rocks—the Indians always say that where the waters are white the rocks are black—showed above the swirling waters,

but it fascinated him, drawing him irresistibly. If the King of the Puk-wudjies himself lay in wait, the deer must have answered, and he lowered himself into the rush again almost joyfully.

The bed of the stream was easier going now, and soon the dangerous trip lay behind, and a curious belt of country, like nothing the young one had ever seen before, ahead.

All Alaska is volcanic. The particular portion on which the moose trenched now was deeply riven with treacherous fissures, which could not be seen from a distance. Here and there subterranean streams ran, insidiously undermining the land. In wide slits, dark and bottomless, the swallows built; in others, the deep wounds of the earth had healed in the passing of the years, and from the depths sprung a tangle of salmon-berry bushes, whose leaves, level with the top of the riven ground, seemed to close the gap tenderly, as is the way with the Earth-Mother.

There was something almost uncanny about the treeless volcanic space with its open rifts and gloomy shadows. The stupidest beast would learn discretion here! Turning widely aside, the moose went off into the safer wilderness.

He met many of his kind in his ramblings, cows with one calf, others with two, bulls in every stage of horn development, and tried to establish friendly relations with all; but his overtures were met with considerable uninterest, an attitude which must be overcome ere the moose yarded up for the winter. Instinct told the youngling that his shrift would be short if he tried to live his hermit-like existence under any but summer conditions. Fate and the wolves had been charitable to him. Better not to tempt either.

Only that morning a timber wolf had loped by and stopped to eye the moose hungrily, returning again and again to take the measure of his youth.

The sooner a friendly ally could be found the better.

As if in answer a bull moose roared close at hand—a grand primeval sound—and next instant stepped majestically out of cover, shaking himself free of clinging pea-vine tendrils. His loose stride, and his head nodding in slow time with the royal swing of his limbs, was arrested as he caught sight of the young Horatius blocking the game trail. His muscles tightened up; the season for the battling of the moose had come.

And Moosewa was not worth fighting; the old bull decided that at once. Not worth fighting now, but—and the critic looked at the growing depth of shoulder and strength of limb—later! Ah! Time and another moose would tell.

At first it was more or less a matter of indifference to the bull whether the young moose followed or not. The forest was wide enough for all. But after two days of persistent tracking and humble imitation, the subtle flattery of such close attention counted for something with a beast long past his prime.

Some moose, like some people, never show old age until they try to hide it. The bull was a very old creature really, though he endeavoured to disguise it under an appearance of agility which cost him an effort to keep up. His head was going off yearly, having long since reached its maximum development, and the bell hanging below his thick throat was bedraggled and slack, a mere piece of loose skin. For all that he seemed a wonderful beast to his young admirer, who followed obediently wheresoever the bull went.

He did not take any trouble to guard his antlers from the blows rained on them by branches of

trees growing across the way, as the young one expected, but thrashed them against any strongly growing bushes for minutes at a time, the while Moosewa waited and watched apprehensively, not realizing that antlers, "being intelligent of seasons," would be in hard fighting trim by September. Soft or hard, they seemed enormous to a youngster with none at all, though they were really nothing wonderful for Alaska, measuring probably somewhere about fifty-five inches across the palms, which were very white in colour, owing to the fact that they had not long been out of velvet. Indeed, tiny shreds, waving like pennons in the breeze, still adhered in places.

The moose of Alaska is a much finer beast than his relative of Canada, and the antlers grown in the Kenai Peninsula of late years have surpassed in size and spread the best Canada has ever produced. The old bull would have been accounted quite a sizeable specimen elsewhere, and it was not until another of his tribe came along that the faithful follower made comparisons.

Now began the time of times in the moose world.

"All made of passion, and all made of wishes."

In ordinary seasons the early days of September heralds the strenuous weeks of warfare and love making, but in bad weather the bulls sometimes postpone their inaugurating challenges until late in the month.

Every Jack was seeking a Jill, rushing through the forest to find her, roaring out his love troubles, calling defiance to rivals, thrashing the trees with vigorous antlers. All the world was a-hum with the sound of moving moose, who cared not these days how noisily they travelled.

The old bull, his slow blood stirred like the rest, left the swamp lands for the higher country, followed by the young one.

The forest seemed possessed. Thrash! Thrash! A moose, with sharp rattling noise, polishing his antlers. He gave a coughing, panting roar, and it sang through the woods. From somewhere across the river his answer came, and with a crash of the undergrowth and a rush of galloping hoofs striking the dry ground, the challenger went off.

A cow moose crossed ahead, with a calf dead-beat, and after them raced a love-lorn two-year-old, with indifferent head and stubby antlers of small

span, who put up no sort of a fight when the old bull butted in and carried off the prize.

He did not hold her long, being divorced from her by the machinations of a mighty moose, whose head carried no horns whatever.

In size, bulk, and general appearance, he was a huge specimen of his tribe, but Fate had docked him of his chief beauty, and by some wound or mischance his antlers had ceased to grow. But there he was, a gay Lothario for all that, with a heart for many cows in the moose world.

The uncrowned monarch held undisputed sway over a range of his forest kingdom, and his triumphant battle-cry woke the echoes at night.

Moosewa could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the hornless one drive before him the respected old leader who at least had antlers of more or less business-like appearance. A lunge of the great bull neck, a fierce drive from razor fore-feet, and the old bull fled before the battering onslaughts of his hornless foe, leaving his cow behind him.

Even whilst he followed, because he could do nothing else, Moosewa scorned his leader now. To be beaten by a beast no bigger than himself, hornless too! He had not lived long enough to under-

stand bush equality, to appreciate the fact that a warrior's soul is often housed in a misshapen frame. Neither had he ever heard the motto of his kind, which forced itself home in years to come: "Despise not any moose. For there is no moose that hath not his hour, nor is there any that hath not his place."

Some part of his lost character the aged bull recovered next evening. He had failed signally to uphold moose tradition, but that there had been episodes in his career not altogether despicable, his facial and other honourable scars declared. If a cloud hung over the closing stage of his existence, and certain it was he gave before the onslaughts of the hornless one very readily, nothing in all the old creature's life became him so much as the ending of it.

The two moose were following each other down an overgrown game path, lit by autumn colourings.

Everywhere scarlet currants burst through the dark green undergrowth and dropped their brilliancies like beads along the way.

A soft, luring call broke the silence, low, penetrating, and peculiarly insistent. Again and again it quivered on the still air, sounding farther off each

time it was repeated. "Follow!" it seemed to cry temptingly. "Follow!"

The old bull stiffened and "pointed," as a good dog would do, and then, relaxing, sniffed excitedly.

The call once more! Prolonged and inviting, until the young moose felt the lure of it fire his blood with a passionate deep tumult altogether unexplainable. He wanted to grow up. To put aside childish things and understand what the strange fever meant, and why he was stirred and shaken to the heart by its sweetness.

The old moose started down the trail like the wind, Moosewa after him, and as he went he sounded a clarion half-cough, half-roar, which rang down the aisles of the trees and was caught up in the branches echoing.

The challenge was answered immediately by another hoarse grunt, to which the old bull responded with all his lungs, encouraged by the idea that the cow, cause of all the trouble, was probably looking on to see how matters shaped themselves.

Cherchez la femme—even in moose-land!

On they rushed, down parallel bush trails, led by the call: "Follow! Follow!"

The cow crossed an open glade, going strong.

"DOWN THE TRAIL LIKE THE WIND"

A very ordinary beast she seemed to Moosewa, and extraordinarily plain to have created such an undoubted sensation. And yet—the call! It was irresistible.

Then wonderful, and again most wonderful, a grand young bull plunged into the fair way ahead, and stood, in his conscious pride and strength, grunting vigorous challenge notes in crescendo scale.

He wore the most splendid bell a moose in his prime could carry, and as he waited the oncoming of his enemy with magnificent crowned head raised, the tassel at the end of the coarse-haired adornment swung to his knees.

The old bull scarce waited to take stock of his foe, but rushed, pell-mell, into the fray, which the younger animal met impassively with lowered head. The crash of their horns as they came together shook the ground. A lynx, crouching near by, hot on the scent of a carefully stalked family of rabbits, went off on cushioned feet in a series of gigantic bounds, caterwauling in affright.

After the first impact, the moose drew away, and, with lowered heads, glared at each other. The younger pawed up the soft earth about him and

thrashed the trees with weighty antlers—sure sign a bull moose is angry. The old animal stood as though carved in bronze, his head still carried at the charge, squaring his shoulders.

With a sudden rush and almost a leap they were wrestling again, crouching curiously in order to obtain the rigid leverage of well-spread legs.

Moosewa, who watched the proceedings carefully, lest he should miss any valuable battle hint likely to be of use in the great hereafter, saw how systematically the old moose husbanded his strength, and how his every effort turned on a series of feints to disentangle instantaneously the locked horns which had a dangerous habit of rattling apart unexpectedly and exposing an unprotected flank. One such chance laid open to attack his whole side, and like lightning the agile opponent saw his advantage and smote his enemy a blow which brought him to his knees.

Because the hidden cow, artful like all feminine things in that she knew the value of the unknown and unrealized, was moving fast, the fight was a running one, and thereby lost much of its effect. Now and again the combatants would forget all about the charmer, and remember only their quarrel

and how they hated each other, and the battle would begin afresh. Then, like the flute of Pan, came the crooning call once more, full of strange yearning pathos—longing, love, fire, feeling, passion, and pain—a sound so thrilling, so moving, that it tugged at Moosewa's heartstrings and left him trembling.

"*Follow! Follow!*"

And at the imperious summons the red-eyed suitors took up Delilah's trail again, drawing their breath in short gusts, and warily watching each other as the density momentarily separated them.

Up and up, to higher ground, the cow led them with her pied-piper lure. Over a high bluff where the spruce trees and firs gave out, and the ground, wind swept, curved upwards in an open track of tundra.

Far below on either side lay the great basins of the Sushitna and Kuskoqwim Rivers—wide, open valleys leading to the sea, and vast forested areas and countless lakes intersected by lagoons. To the north-east, some eighty miles away, the snow-clad peak of Mount McKinley, highest and grandest of Alaskan mountains, reared his towering hulk.

To the hotly contested battle again, and so

intent were the furious combatants that neither noticed the distance covered, or that the plateau had its limits, or that the cow had spirited herself away and called no more.

The tongue of high land elevated high above the tree-tops ended in a sheer granite bluff which walled an end of a sombre lake sunk deep in a forbidding rocky tract, cruel in its darkness.

Backwards, backwards across the tundra the old bull was beaten, fighting now with the heart and breath knocked out of him. He knew he was vanquished, that youth had conquered, as it always must. This lusty young moose was a warrior indeed—the Olympic prize was his.

Rattle, rattle went the great palmated horns as they met in clashing combat, and then sounded no more. For though the finer antlers carried by the younger bull far overlapped the spread of those worn by his opponent, points in their declension frequently turn curiously, and stretch out clutching claw-like tips dangerously.

They were wrestling now on the extreme edge of the bluff, unseeing, unthinking—the love-smoke in their eyes. A greater danger than the horns and hoofs of his enemy yawned behind the beaten

bull, who gave at every lunge, retaliating not at all.

Outlined against a glowing sky the Berserk pressed his victory home, hugging the slippery grass with all the force of which he was capable. His weighty head, fast locked to that of his enemy, tossed backwards and forwards low to ground.

He was merciless, and in the pride of his royal youth saw the looming space and the drop to nothingness as a tribute to his strength and prowess. He had driven his enemy to its verge, and now would thrust him over.

Nearer, nearer yet!

For a quick, wild second it almost seemed that the old bull placed his back feet in space and as quickly recovered himself. Together the two great creatures tottered on the brink of the yawning abyss, and then gently and very quickly the elder fell backwards, pulling the conqueror with him. Their interlocked horns had no give in them. Vanquished and victor made an exit in company.

There was no sound. The lake, purple-black and forbidding, lay unruffled. On a rocky eminence a bald eagle, gorged beyond the power of move-

ment, sat, with white tail feathers widely outspread, amid a collection of rotting salmon.

With the night in sudden squall from the mountains, a typical Alaskan "woolly" came down, than which there can be nothing less soft or wool-like. For an hour the tempest raged, and banks of black clouds piled up on a lurid sky. At intervals lightning played about the forest, and struck into its deepest recesses, and the wind, racing apace above the river bars, sobbed the De Profundis of the wild.

CHAPTER VI

HIS FIRST WINTER

"Whose hand is that the forest bear doth lick?"

Henry VI.

"No temple but the wood,
No assembly but the horned beasts."

As You Like It.

How he got down from the tragic heights Moosewa hardly knew. The sloping grass-land somehow melted mysteriously away as he rushed over it pell-mell, and slid into a gorge sleeked with coarse snow, and down again through a maze of wide glens through which the resin-tang of the pine-needles swept with messages from the forest. Skulking between a dense alder and spruce outcrop the young moose gained a sanctuary of bracken beneath a mighty hemlock.

That night the horned beasts roared on every side for hours, mingling their coughing grunts with the ravings of the tempest. The youngling, lying up soft and warm in his snug bed, as the wind

whistled overhead, and branches crashed to earth, and lightning lit up the dark corners as with a flare, tried hard to forget the tragedy of the early evening. His companion of many days was gone. Coward the old bull may have been on occasion, but as the vision of his thick shoulders squaring up against the battering onslaughts of an agile foe recalled itself, Moosewa forgot all temperamental shortcomings, and remembered only the best of his dead Mentor.

A light covering of snow lay upon the forest, a foreboding of winter that cast its spell on many things.

The great transition was at hand. On the higher grounds the ptarmigan, speckled brown and white now, preparatory to turning white as the snowbird, were forming up into packs, in late autumn habit; the cock birds crowing in mournful tones the requiem of the short summer, so different to the laughing chuckle with which they salute the spring.

Because food was scarce, the bears were holing up early, and the amount of labour bestowed upon their shelters depended as much on how long they would be occupied as upon the methods of the inhabitant-to-be. Bruin of the black coat prepared

to force the rigours of winter in the roots of fallen trees, or beneath piled brushwood on leaves scraped together, relying on the first heavy snowfall to fill up the chinks. The big brown cousins, who felt the cold in much less degree, holed up considerably later, in caves and the holes of hill-sides.

One late denner left his hibernating arrangements until the last moment, and being caught in a heavy snowstorm, bundled into the nearest shelter that offered—a hollow in the river-bank where a tree had been uprooted, just above a vast beaver pantry, fast glazing over with ice.

Two or three ardent spirits did not take holing up at all seriously, but intended emerging at intervals to see how the world wagged. These, of course, were mercurial specimens, incurably sociable by nature, and none of their relations comfortably ensconced until spring had any patience with them, after the manner of human kindred, to whom more things are showed than some of us understand.

As to whether or no the time-old superstition that during hibernation bears kill time and obtain sustenance by licking their oily paws is true, I cannot tell you, and it is more than my author's job is worth to find out. A wise publisher showed

his wisdom by commissioning me to write the life story of a moose, which meant, *inter alia*, something of the lives of beasts met by the way; but at no stage in the arrangements did I undertake to produce first-hand knowledge of what hibernating bears do with themselves once they are comfortably fastened up for the winter. Though all argument is against the paw-licking idea, all belief is for it. And that is as far as we can safely go.

As the young moose got up to feed he found that a sharp frost had made the snow firm and crackling, and that his big hoofs left sharp imprints. Presently he struck the trail of a couple of lynxes whose diary of the night was also traced upon the snow, partly covered, but not sufficiently to obliterate the details of how a red fox died. Very little of him was left to tell the story. Just his splendid brush, which rolled over and over in the wind, and a few gruesome scraps for whose possession the ravens fought.

A piece of bark gnawed from off a cottonwood struck the moose lightly, and brought him up pondering. A marten, perhaps, in the high tops, or an overloaded squirrel getting in last supplies.

Making no attempt to get away or to obliterate

himself, a porcupine looked down coolly, trusting to his serrated-edged quills for protection against reprisals. His winter top-coat of long hair just about covered his rapiers; another month would see him in fine apparel.

The migratory birds had long since departed, but the ubiquitous grey-plumaged "camp-robber," thief of the woods, did his best to fill the gap; the ravens, too, who make nothing of a temperature of 50° below zero. A sprightly finch, disdaining winter coloration, flitted through the coldest snaps, a black dot on the landscape. Berries of all kinds were scarce now, insects dead, but the tiny bird eked out a living somehow on the spruce-tops.

With the sudden cold and an atmosphere keen enough to freeze the mercury in a thermometer, came those weird lamentations in the sky which have turned the blood of many a tenderfoot to ice. They started so low and wearily, wailing like muted strings, then gathered in volume, and sank, and rose, and trembled, and dwelt, until they died utterly in a wild sobbing laughter, horrible to hear. What the extraordinary effect betokens the oldest trapper of them all could not explain. Only the

Aleuts and the Indians know. To them the voices crying in the wilderness are those of slain heroes, who, sweeping across the sky to join in the "Dance of Death," which is their name for the Aurora Borealis, are met by contending evil spirits blocking the heavenly way.

As the snow came down heavier and heavier each day, restricting his food-supply, the young moose began to think of winter quarters.

Finding that a moose family, consisting of a grand ten-year-old bull, whose fine antlers were curiously malformed across the palmations, having a fence-like row of points sticking up, a five-year-old bull, and a very small specimen of what a moose at three years of age ought not to be, two cows, and two calves, appeared to welcome any stray companion they could gather in, Moosewa tacked on to the little company, following its leader gladly, because he saw that the old beast knew the best plans for setting winter conditions at naught, and also that safety lies in numbers sometimes.

Though not naturally gregarious, moose frequently yard up together for winter, selecting carefully the range of country over which they mean to roam. One after the other the heavy beasts browse

on the birch, ash, juniper, and other low-growing trees, following in each other's steps; and as the snow falls it is trampled in, and thus the long, winding paths, or yards, are made. Every day sees the same track passed over, so that even in deep snow a hard-beaten trail runs hither and thither over a wide area. Very old bulls yard up by themselves, and, ranging over a restricted tract, often eat themselves out of yard and home, which means the forming of a new feeding-ground under most difficult climatic conditions.

The nights grew colder; Moosewa's breath froze on his lips, and all the hairs around his muzzle were ice-beaded. Often on the keen, crisp air a quick echoing clamour rang—the wolves forming up into small packs. The small game to be had in summer for the easy hunting was gone now; winter called for the strength and craft of numbers. When the young moose saw grey, skulking forms moving like phantoms one after another through the fog-banks, he pressed for safety close to the older bulls as they travelled down the yards. At night he slept under the protective shadow of the ten-year-old's antlers, with one ear open, knowing all the time that chance, and chance alone, was the real arbiter of his fortunes.

He saw more of the bush people than he had ever done in summer. They showed up so clearly against the snow, and roamed farther afield in search of food.

Otters setting forth on prolonged overland trips from one frozen river to another crossed the yards frequently, making a trail with their short, little legs such as a log pulled over the snow would form; and once, as the moose leader extended his district somewhat, the deer came on a company of four otters engaged in winter sports.

One by one they climbed laboriously to the crest of a snow ridge above an ice-bound stream, and one by one, lying flat, with fore-feet carefully bent backwards as runners, each otter gave himself a slight impetus by pressing his back legs against the hard snow, when off he went tobogganing down the short incline until he shot out over the straight of the frozen water. This game the sportive creatures continued until their slide was as slippery as glass, and it needed but a touch to send the agile gliders from end to end of the polished shute.

I don't know that a prettier bush picture exists than that of the otter on his slide of mud or snow, unless it be a nursery of tiny gazelles at play.

In the grim, wild nights the far-sightedness of the lynx—a sense said to be developed in those of the tribe living in the far northern regions to a much greater extent than in those inhabiting Canada—was brought into frequent play.

One big old male, who crossed the moose-yards often on silent, snow-shod feet, hunted tirelessly, regardless of the temperature. Quite fifty inches long and twenty inches high, his abbreviated tail spanned but a beggarly five. His neck-ruff was long and grizzled, and his tufted ears blackly pencilled—an imposing and majestic beast, with the wickedness of the centuries at the back of his eyes, and an illustration of the name "Lucivee," which the French Canadians adapted for him from *loup cervier* (deer wolf), in every curve of his lithe limbs. Something of the spring and quiver of a deer lay in his elastic body, something of the force and cruelty of the wolf in his cunning glance.

More silent than any other of the bush folk, it was to this noiselessness, combined with his stratagems and patience, that the lynx owed his success, for his sense of smell was nothing out of the ordinary—rather under it, in fact. That he was

successful where others failed his sleek condition showed. Where the fox miscalculated, Lucivee saw his way clearly; where the strong wolf's leap fell short by a foot or so, Lucivee encompassed the distance and over; where the gluttonous wolverine, with all his vaunted wisdom, bungled, Lucivee killed every time. If he missed on rare occasion, he accepted his bad luck like a philosopher in silence; and taking the comforting unction to his crafty soul that all things come to him who lies in wait, returned to his look-out.

And as exceptionally heavy falls of snow filled the forest, penetrating even under the biggest trees, and the nights cloaked a dead and frozen world, the lynx took on a ferocity which made him as formidable as a wolf.

Nothing, surely, but the hunger madness could have made Lucivee attack that powerful musteline, Carcajou, the wolverine, who has forgotten, and never missed, more than the lynx ever knew!

The wolverine had hunted the moonlit pine-woods fruitlessly. Hunger drove him at last up a few feet of a rough-barked tree, where, in a cavernous hole between two branches, he hoped

to find a family of squirrels. He had known them all the summer, watched the little ones grow up, marked them down, indeed, in readiness for such hard times as the present. They had curled up for the winter in a plenteous storehouse, and now they must give up their lives that Carcajou, the glutton, might survive.

Alas! the Providence designed to watch over squirrels had moved them to sleep elsewhere.

Clumsily, the shaggy wolverine dropped disconsolately to the snow. Across the frozen open waste a pine-marten, distant relative of Carcajou's, trailed nose to the track of a long-passed rabbit. Moving rapidly, his broad, flat feet buoyed him up on the softest surface.

A dark shadow falling athwart his path brought him up in a weasel-like wriggle, and almost instantly a great eagle owl, in phosphorescent plumage, pinioned the hunter against a hummock of ice. In a series of protesting squeaks the marten closed his hunting-days.

The wolverine saw it all, and for the first time cannabalism presented itself with all its insidious force. The flesh of marten, sauced even by hunger, is no great treat, and few of the carnivorous animals

of the North care for it. Things had come to a grim pass with Carcajou. He was a beggar who could not choose.

The eagle owl sat poised on the tiny pinnacle of ice, trying to bolt whole his fair-sized victim, somewhat of a proposition for even so big an owl. Over and over again the bird tried conclusions with his supper, until, growing fearful of the wolverine's shining eyes, he flew off in swooping circles, leaving his prey.

Carcajou stepped in and finished the business, cleaning up the remains, and wishing there was more; and then, too, the lynx, sniffing the new blood, which ever drew him like a magnet, turned his soft feet towards the scene. Blood always sent Lucivee Berserk.

The wolverine was greedily polishing off the last of the pine-marten, fearing nothing. He had enemies, of course, but none were afoot to-night. Not a twig stirred; the newly-fallen snow lay without a hint of any spoor. Over him the grotesquely branching trees drooped under the weight of their heavy cloaks.

Dragging himself soundlessly over the snow like a snake, the ravenous cat moved rapidly across the

frozen twenty yards which separated him from the beast he meant to strike down.

Closer—closer !

Raising himself suddenly with a strong springing bound, which tightened up his wiry muscles automatically, the fierce carnivore fell on his strong victim so dexterously that retaliation was impossible.

The wolverine lay dead, with his carotids cut through by razor teeth. Purring softly, his slayer lapped the warm blood as it trickled over the snow.

Crack ! A tree split from base to tops by a frost-blow. The lynx went off in sideway jumps, mewing in cresendo key, until, realizing that the terrifying noise meant no more than his own caterwaulings, was nothing, indeed, but another of the ambuscades of which Nature sets so many, he returned warily, to finish his meal in peace.

Fantastical, long-eared, shadowy forms, playing on an illumined horizon, lured him to hunt again. Rabbits ! Long searched for, out after hours, wantonly endangering the precarious existence a carefully contrived winter colour scheme was designed to continue.

And so the frozen days and nights passed by in dreary sequence, nights irradiated often by the Aurora's glow, days so exactly like the last that the young moose lost track of time, and began to think his life had always held these hours of following the leader's fawn-coloured tail down interminable white tracks winding through ice-bound woods, or of lying for warmth as close as he could get to the little company whose united ascending breaths froze instantly into a faint, filmy shadow of snow-dust.

Two events stood out and marked eras. In December the magnificent antlers of the moose leader fell off, and left him as ordinary looking, but for his mammoth bulk, as the cows.

Moosewa felt something sharp strike his shoulder as he lay drowsing in the darkness of a sheltered copse. It frightened him somewhat, but the peaceful outline of the big bull was reassuring. At the first hint of danger he would have been on his feet.

Day dawned grey and fog-laden. Through the haze the ungainly forms of the moose loomed spectrally as they followed a peculiarly lop-sided-looking guide. One of his antlers had gone, and

lay on the glittering snow embedded to half its spread.

All that day its counterpart, holding in its palmation a tiny field of frozen snow, stood firm, in spite of vigorous efforts made to dislodge it from its pedicel. Furiously its wearer thrashed the odd adornment against bushes, against the stems of trees, and shook himself in gusts, giving no time to feeding, but all to the throwing aside of an unwanted horn.

Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. How much uneasier a moose-head that wears but half!

All night the restless bull tossed and turned on his snowy bed, until with the morning the stately antler went down before the smashing blows it sustained as its irritated wearer brought the strong bone-work to bear on the task of demolishing a stalwart hemlock.

The five-year-old bull lost his antlers next, the three-year-old a day or so later. Whether Moosewa's little spikes cast themselves or not he did not know. Such apologies for antlers could not concern anyone. Best to ignore them. Only those vast bony leaves, prinked at their wide edges into curious frills and outstanding points, counted.

There they lay on the snow, the shed crowns of kings, and who heeded!

Next time the deer passed over the place a white pall had covered up the branching coronals, hiding them utterly.

The other event which marked out one winter's day from monotonous likeness to another was the death of the youngest of the little company.

There he lay, apparently asleep, when the deer rose to feed, with his charming head drooped, and his long legs tucked under him.

His mother stood over him calling softly on a deep, low note—calling, calling.

The wind blew the snow-dust high into the upper air in whirling spirals, which hung awhile, and then drifted away down the yards in ghostly columns. From the depths of the forest came the weird, hollow knocks, made, so the Indians tell you, by unhappy frost-spirits imprisoned in the trees.

And the calf slept on, frozen stiff. The night had been the coldest of the winter, and Death, in kindly fashion, had stricken the one of all the moose less able to withstand the severe snap.

For awhile the cow stood beside the carcass, nosing it at intervals, unheeding that her com-

panions had moved off down the yards in search of the hard-to-find twigs and bark which grew scantier with each frosty day.

A dreary howl, long-drawn and sobbing, lashed like a siren round the endless wastes, and on the cow the effect was magical.

Wolves! And in a quick, shambling trot the ungainly beast disappeared behind a spruce laden to falling with its weight of snow.

Over the stainless waste a shy, swiftly moving fox, one with the whitened landscape, crept on dainty feet, shod for Arctic explorations with mocassins of hair. He was starving. His larder, where he had cached a small amount of food, had been raided by a lynx, and hereabouts there were no traps from which to try and steal the bait. Time was! But those days were in other districts, far distant from these unhunted regions.

The near-by howl had told him that time was too short for the usual preliminaries, the essential strategies beloved of the foxes of the world. He must rush in, grab what he could, and bolt for cover.

He rushed, grabbed nothing, and got back to cover as the faint rustle of disparted snow gave

warning signal. Only his greatest enemy scrapped on the hard snow like that, regardless of all the rules for silent stalking.

A lean, yellow-grey wolf loped up to the carcass, and fell-to silently. When he had fed well, he threw up his savage head and gave the kill-call: O-o-o-o-h-h-h! O-o-o-o-h-h-h! W-a-a-a-h-h-h! W-a-a-a-h-h-h!

Over the horizon came a low hunched form, running in leaps, first of the beasts of prey to answer. Then another and another.

Flakes of snow, big as a dollar piece, descended heavily, wrapping the despoilers and the dead in a winding sheet.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRAPPER

"Such a worthy leader."
King Henry VI.

"He was furnished like a hunter."
As You Like It.

That extremely severe weather had some advantages, the moose, like all the rest of the bush people, knew. In January and February, climax of the Northern winter, when the temperature seldom arose above 50° below zero, the snow ceased to fall, and lay dry as sand, unable to congeal and ball up beneath pad or hoof. The transparency and stillness of the atmosphere was wonderful and invigorating, too, and imparted a very clear-cut effect to all the surrounding country. Each tree standing in a serried rank stood out alone from the mass, sharp etched. The tiniest break in the woods limned its fine outlines in magical array.

The sky was intensely blue, and almost always

cloudless, only the jagged peaks of the mountains rising from distant horizons were swathed about their summits with white vapour. Stars shone with a brilliancy unknown to us, and in the ethereal moonlight the charm of the frozen world was, to all but nocturnal hunters, one of dreams and silence, a time of peace in which the daily burden of keeping life going had fallen from weary shoulders.

The cold snaps, during which the temperature sometimes dropped to 60° and 70° below zero, seldom lasted for more than a fortnight at a time, and when, at the end of March, a soft Chinook wind sprang up and blew warm and balmy through the forest, it sent the temperature, which had been 30° below all the month, above zero, and on one sunny day, filched from summer, above freezing-point, the young moose thought spring was surely at hand.

Such unwonted conditions merely heralded a shower of rain, which, followed by another excessively cold snap, turned the surface of the yards to sheets of ice, over which the moose, ill-shod for such ventures, slid and struggled and fell their way round the far-flung browsing-grounds.

It was the black she-bear whose winter home

was in the dense brushwood tangle out beyond the limit of the yards who brought the first hint of spring. All the cold weather through a little jet of steam arose from the conical shelter, save when heavy drifts snowed the den under. Then, gradually, very gradually, as the conditions overhead moderated, the heat inside undermined the frozen roof, and the tiny yellow hole at the apex emitted the gentle vapour once more to float away in a faint *susurrus* of snow-dust.

How the bear knew it was nearly time to come forth Moosewa could not guess, for the snow lay deep everywhere, and icicles clung yet to the hanging bell of the big moose, tinkling together musically with every lurching step the great beast took.

Rolling in fat in spite of her long fast, and very groggy on her stiff legs, the bear broke through the encrusting wall of snow and came out into the open, followed haltingly by two extraordinary helpless atoms, covered with soft, cinnamon-coloured hair, and a thick dark underwool, which made them appear much larger than they really were.

Seeing the weather conditions, and the hopelessness of protecting the defenceless young ones against the myriad enemies—wolves, foxes, lynxes,

and go-ahead minks—lying in wait with wits sharpened to a deadly cunningness by winter shortages, the bear decided on denning up again until the spring was farther advanced.

Back she went to the outlet of her snow beehive, and driving the cubs before her into the cavernous hole, crept after them into the aperture. Her movements, stealthy though they were, dislodged an avalanche from the roof-tree, which effectually blocked in the little party, secure and warm once more.

Nothing but the clear track of her feet, and the lesser, lighter traces of the cubs', told of the mistaken issue forth. She denned up again, deeming the fictitious call another of Nature's ambuscades. She had thought the sweet o' the year was at hand, and lo, winter reigned sovereign still.

The ravens, wandering on the river in search of frozen-in scraps brought down from the mountains, thought otherwise. They felt the ice quake and quiver beneath their spreading claws, and fluttered on wide wings to the banks, croaking "*Cruck! Cruck!*" menacingly. Then, as the pale sun shone and touched the frozen surface to dim rosy gold, the big birds flung themselves into the upper air

and played together in floating flight, their deep cries changed now to the triumphant "*Kung! Kung!*"

And in its tang was the call! Moosewa heard it, all beasts heard it. Spring stood golden sandalled on the threshold of the frost-bound woods.

It was well. The twigs and bark of trees, on which the moose entirely depended now, were almost frosted out.

Then came the event which drove the deer far away into unbroken snowy regions, where moving about was difficult.

They were travelling slowly down the well-beaten yards one morning, looking over the eaten-out bushes for a chance sprig or top, when a soft swish, swish on the snow made them draw together fearfully.

A dark figure flickered across an abbreviated horizon, carrying across his shoulders a bunch of dead, stiffly-frozen martens, and pulling after him a light sleigh, made of birch thongs lashed together, with long runners on the principle of skis. And as he sped along on swift snow-shoes he sang in a weird, strange way that reminded Moosewa of the cry of Keneu in his eyrie—Keneu saluting the dawn.

Where for generations the wilderness people had lived unmolested, the inevitable day had come for their haunts to be discovered.

The trapper had been in the vicinity all the winter, as he hunted alone through the fiercest cold that he might trap the fur-bearers when their pelts were at their best. His trap-lines ran in an opposite direction to that circumvented by the yards, and he rarely roamed outside his beaten trail. Now a deep-laid plan for putting an end to the amazingly planned engineering works of the beaver colony in the backwater of the river had brought him out of his course. To-morrow he would commence ensnaring the world-builders, one by one.

The winding trail of the moose engaged his attention, and he turned from his way to investigate.

The criss-cross of tracks ran hither and thither in all stages of clearness and obliteration. Some partially snowed under and turned to a cuplike formation, others sharp and distinct, as though cut in by a sculptor's chisel.

That the band of moose who fed hereabouts had winded or seen him the trapper knew, for the

imprints of the morning disclosed the patent fact that the animals had made off running. Particles of frozen snow kicked up and scattered far in advance of the tracks told the story. A heavy beast like the moose, in raising its foot out of snow, necessarily knocks up a little snow with the fore of every hoof, incriminating mounds that betray direction just as surely as long strides determine pace.

Before him as he crossed the beaten yards lay the imprints of a bear—a good one, too. How long they had lain there he could hardly guess, for tracks in sheltered places very often remain for indefinite periods ; but his practised eye took in the situation at a glance, and his dull blood thrilled at the unexpected stroke of luck.

Rarely can a trapper obtain a bear-skin during the hibernating season. His chance lies in shooting the first bears out before their fine winter coats are ruined by the havoc worked by the bushes and wear and tear of the forests.

Cutting down a stalwart spruce with a light axe, the hunter arranged the sling of his rifle so that the weapon lay to a ready hand, making no special feature of silence, and taking his stand on the verge

of the frozen heap in which he knew—none so well —the bear was holed up, thrust the strong pole deep into the shelter.

The snow was too solid to cut through, and resisted the most vigorous efforts; but at last, in sudden rush, the heavy bulk went down into the hollow beneath.

Pulling it out again, after a frantic swirl, the unkempt man, not so very unlike a bear himself, shouted down the aperture—shouted all manner of strange things, working off the hideous ban of silence in an odd admixture of American and coast-Indian swear-words—surely the most potent in all the world!—bidding her come forth and bring the cubs with her, telling her, too, with a cold bloodthirstiness which made him chuckle to himself, just how much she would fetch in the trading-post market.

"Twenty dollars, I guess, and the cubs, darn them! thrown in."

All this sounds as though the Northern trapper is wont to treat the ursine inhabitants of the Alaskan wilderness very cavalierly. The opposite is the case, especially where the big brown bears and the grizzlies are concerned. In this particular

instance the she-bear hadn't a chance, and was doomed ere she issued from her den.

The natives of Alaska, poorly armed, mostly with Winchesters worn out and untrustworthy, have an inherent respect for the bear tribe peculiar to all those who share their fastnesses with the dangerous arctoids whose exploits are the basis for most wild folk-tales of the world; they ever endow the bear with a reputation which places the animal in the forefront of all keen-witted, well-armed beasts of prey. And all unknowingly something of this mysterious respect the average trapper imbibes.

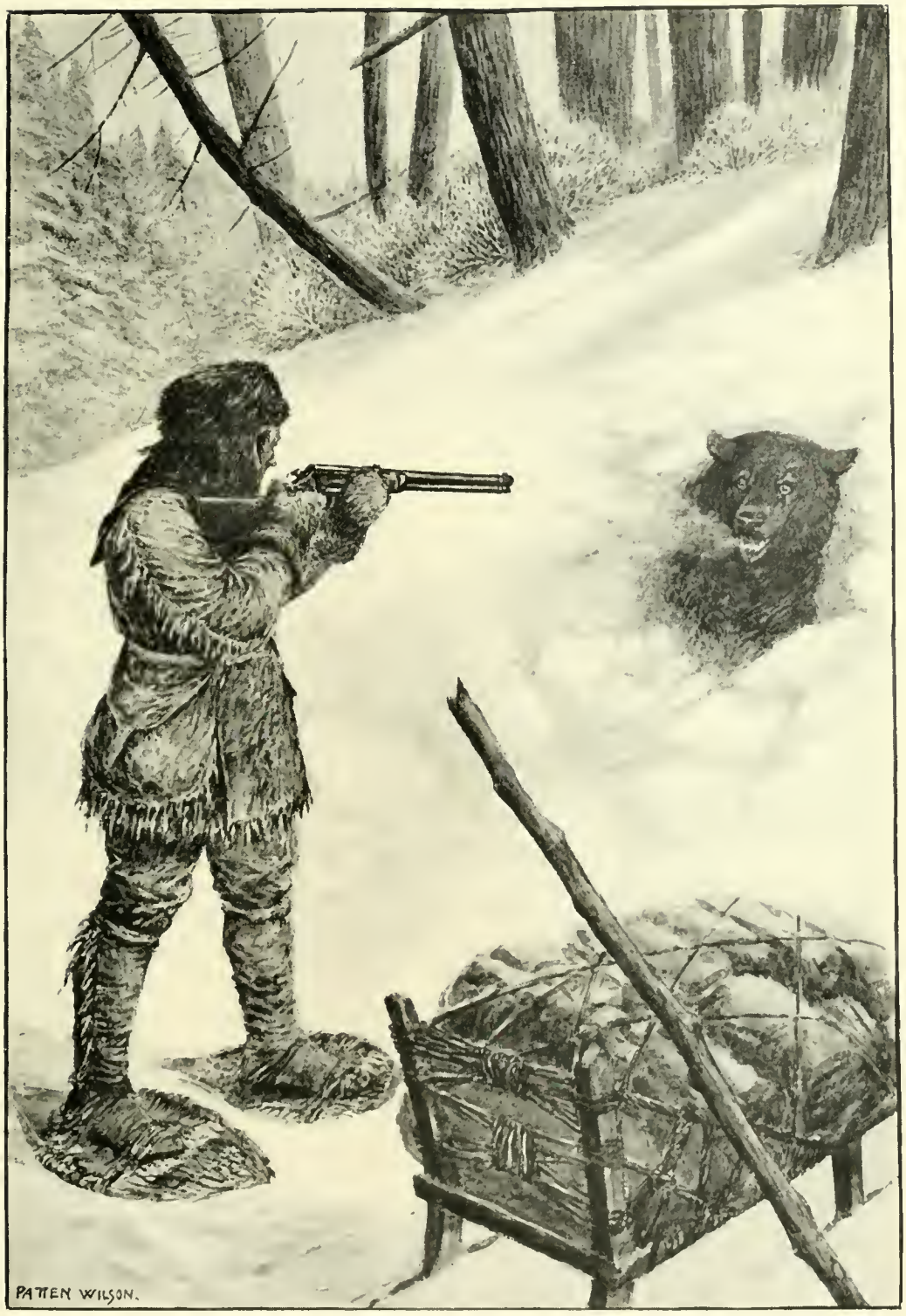
A wild series of thrusts and encircling prods roused the semi-dormant bear to fury. Subterranean growls shook the snow-covered den, not the usual "Woofs!" which often indicate that the bear himself is badly startled, but a fierce succession of grumbly snarls. The snow cracked and vibrated with the lashing around inside the hollow, and still the trapper turned his pole remorselessly. When the she-bear would emerge he could not guess, neither did he much care. The sense of hunting something was on him—a grand, primeval "defend yourself" sort of feeling, which makes wits sharp and senses keen.

The air seemed tense with untoward chances, and the trapper suddenly felt that his quarry was about to come out. Something—a sixth sense, perhaps—warned him to get ready. Dropping his spruce-pole, his hand in its thick fur mitts brought up the rifle.

He raised the foresight, and at that instant a bulky mass shot through the recently fastened up entrance with incredible rapidity, followed by two hampering little creatures, who tumbled about on the snow on insecure cramped legs.

The trapper pulled off instantly, and the bear fell forward, catching the strong light from the snow on her glossy black coat—a splendid beast, robed royally for winter.

Turning her head, she bit savagely at the wound in her side, and with long curved claws beat the ground in furious impotence; and then rallying, with a speed wonderful for so cumbersome and ungainly an animal, she shot at her enemy, ears back, snout upraised, hindquarters low, with all the strength and force and striking-power of her thrown into the massive forearms. In another stride or two she would have been on her enemy, but she reckoned without his modern rifle. She faced no ill-equipped Indian hunter.



AT CLOSE RANGE

The trapper dropped her with a well-placed bullet in the chest, which, raking through, despatched her at once. She stopped all movement almost with a click, like a clockwork toy, and fell at the entrance to her winter home.

I wish I could record that the lives of the little ones were spared. I wish I could! But—well, a trapper is not out for his health. He quests for pelts for a livelihood, not because he likes it, and what furs he gets he works hard for. We must all live, even though a certain philosopher said he saw no reason for it.

Such an idea as keeping the cubs alive never occurred to the hunter. He had no way of maintaining them for even half a day. His own commissariat arrangements were of the roughest, and tinned milk a luxury unknown. The idea never came to him, and he slew the little creatures remorselessly. Those that are without a muff among you cast the first stone.

The dismemberment was rendered difficult owing to the acute cold, but the carcass was much too heavy for one man to tow across the snow to the distant log shack. It had to be accomplished somehow, and with that resource which marks out

a practised trapper above all other men, the hunter set to work deftly, still keeping on his hampering mitts, which enclosed all his fingers together, save the thumb, resting in a partition to itself—a little fur bag.

It was an astonishing sight, as the skin was stripped, to see the thick layers of fat covering the carcass, for all the world as though no compulsory fast had been indulged in. Some of this the trapper reserved for frying purposes. His supply of moose suet was getting low.

At last the heavy pelt lay rolled up ready for packing home. The carcass the trapper had to leave on the stained snow for the foxes and the wolves. It was enough to pull the bodies of the cubs and the weighty green pelt. He tied the former together, lest one should jerk off the sleigh, added the take of martens and the rolled bear-skin, adjusted his snow-shoes, and set off for his log hut.

The snow here and there was very bad going, and it was wonderful how a man so impeded could so gamely struggle on. Nature has a way of suiting strength to the burdens, as the burdens to the strength.

"You do not mind my weight?" said the apologetic fly in the elephant's ear.

"Not at all," said the elephant; "I really did not know that you were there."

The blazed homeward trail was picked up a mile away from the moose yards, out beyond the plateau, over which the river sometimes flowed in spring. Twisting and turning down the tunnels of the trees, it opened up suddenly and dropped to the frozen lake—an occasional short cut home.

Taking off his snow-shoes, the hunter laid them on the sleigh, and stepped out on the river ice in moccasins of moose hide, tanned very soft and pliable. He began to feel the sleigh hang heavy on his shoulders, the drag of the ropes irked.

Dotted down the length of the narrow lake were water-holes, produced by warm springs, over which the ice filmed in hard weather, easily opened waterways beloved of the musk-rats, who built their winter habitations, domed heaps of leaves and mud laboriously dragged thither, around them.

Just as he neared the opposite bank the trapper walked into a not observable water-hole, sinking to his waist, and as the sleigh still stood behind him on hard ice, he counted himself lucky not to have

gone through, pelts and all, where the lake was deeper.

He had his light axe handy, and matches in case of necessity, and it was not the first time Fate had served him so trickily—not the first time he had contrived a fire in the open, anyhow, and dried his clothes. But it was growing late, and the thought of the shack with its primitive comforts was something he could not put away. Fixing on his snowshoes to his already stiffening moccasined feet, he went forward slowly, across a waste swept by the wind.

It cut like a knife. His wet parka—a native-made coat of caribou skin, worn over all for warmth—froze solid, and banged against his ice-cold legs—a sheet of iron. Three pairs of woollen socks, freezing inside his moccasins, held like a cruel vice, and numbed his toes to painless disuse.

The ropes attached to the sleigh slipped from his shoulders, and he did not pick them up again, but stood a moment looking ahead with unseeing gaze.

He must sleep. Just for a little while, a quarter of an hour, perhaps, long enough to take the ache from his bones. Here on the snow, beside the sleigh. It would serve as shelter from the wind.

With a sudden start of returning consciousness, the trapper realized the danger in which he stood. If he gave way to the exhaustion and the cold which together worked to paralyze his senses and benumb his brain, he would never wake again.

Between the mountains streaking off to the north in a line of glittering pinnacles, that strange phenomenon called by the natives "dog-suns," shone down, a curious atmospheric effect for which there seems no lucid explanation. Four faint mock-suns supported the heatless orb, one on each side, one above and below.

Countless times the trapper had seen the parhelion as the northern spring was ushered in, and thought but little of it. Now in his semi-dazed condition the shape of it struck him forcibly as something familiar.

A centre light, one on each side, one above and below.

He had it. A cross—a cross of fire. And crosses marked graves! His feet, frost-bitten and dead, could sustain him no more, and he dropped to the snow drowsily.

With a superhuman effort he began to crawl, dragging himself along by inches.

Just round the bend where the snow-wall stood —he had thrown it up himself as protection from the winds—was safety and the shack. He knew every landmark by heart. The tree split by a frost-blow, the moose skull he had placed in the branch of the big pine, the track across which he passed daily to his reserve of fuel, cut on days too cold to venture forth over the trap-lines.

He would crawl on, cheat the grim, grey tracker who waited on his heels, and gaining the shelter of the hut, warm his hands. They were cold—very cold.

The cross had faded. Nothing was in sight but a hawk in the high air, wheeling, wheeling.

It was but a few yards now to the door of the shack, so courageously had the crawler covered the harsh surface of the snow; it was but the length of the little hut twice over, and yet—how tremendous the distance, how almost more than uttermost human effort could overcome.

He must rest—he must rest! Had man ever worked so hard before, or ever better earned his sleep.

Scarcely the span of the trapper's own height stood between him and his goal when he lay down —beaten.

Awhile, and the snow began to fall. Softly, thickly, it filled the abandoned sleigh, standing empty now, for the wolves had found it out already, at the marge of the frozen lake, and it cloaked the trees afresh until they drooped their laden branches wearily.

All was still—still as death, save for the endless movement of the dense white flakes covering with gentle, mystic mercy the sleeper at the door.

* * * * *

On the grinding, dry snow the moose, half-veiled in a soft mist, followed their leader swiftly as the surface of the yards would allow them, and out beyond the confines of the well-trodden ways. Sometimes the ice-crust held up the heavy beasts, and sometimes they went through chest deep, from which half-submerged position they extricated themselves adroitly by jumping—such prodigious jumps, measuring four yards or more between the hoof-marks.

Under big timber the depth of snow was of small account, and everywhere signs of the trapper from whom they fled met their troubled eyes.

In an open space between the pines small bits of strychnined moose meat were cast about haphazard

at distances sufficient to keep a wolf or fox sniffing around until the poison should have had time to do its work. Farther, a frightful whiff heralded the outline of an ingeniously made stockade, baited with rotten fish smeared over with castoreum, which concealed a noose for snaring lynx.

Death and destruction loomed on every side.

A black fox, with not a rusty hair upon him, but a few of shining silver at the tip of his fine brush, lay crouching beside an upright stick rubbed over with the fatally attractive beaver castor, with his right fore-foot caught in a small steel-jawed trap lying buried beneath the snow.

He represented in all his rarity and prime condition the fortune of a trapper's lifetime, seeing that his market price, even at a trading-post, would top a thousand dollars.

Cunning and adroit as he was, seldom to be taken in by any sophistry of man, the beautiful beast had missed his way for once!

He looked up with a shrinking terror in his eyes as the big deer lumbered slowly by, and something in his forlorn attitude drew Moosewa to him. The fox was a prisoner, even as the young moose himself had been. He would go, perhaps,

to a pen like the barring corral, far from his own people, and eat his heart out running round its walls.

With the recklessness of utter despair the black fox fell to gnawing his foot, severing the strong sinews ruthlessly, tearing through bone and flesh with strong canine teeth, whimpering a little as an injured dog whimpers, but always gnawing, gnawing.

He laid his foot on the altar of freedom like the hero he was. There it stood, upheld in the sharp jaws of the small trap, with red-edged bones, black and delicately moulded. And across the snow the crippled fox moved free, hop-and-go-one, carrying his injured leg.

Travelling onwards swift as they could, far beyond the lands where the dreaded man-smell lurked, the little company jumped an old bull moose yarded up by himself in a hollow belt of scrub bushes screened from the keen winds by a granite wall of Nature's building. Here beneath a rude pilaster he made his bed, there under a column broken asunder in the course of the years he sheltered from the snow-storms.

He would have none of their advances, and turned his back on them. His hornless head was

of far greater size than that of Moosewa's leader, and there was that about him which told of incalculable age.

Far up the vast ravines the snow fell in cataracts from the heights, piling into the rivers, which rose until the ice could hold the force of water no longer, and broke up in a series of minute cracks and fissures over which the ravens and the roaming moose rats travelled fearlessly. Then for a week it lay quiet, until one morning the forest folk wakened to see what had been for so long a strong hard sheet of blue-green-white floating in blocks of fantastical shapes.

Rushing in swollen volume, the tossing waters flung the titantic floes high and dry on the icy banks, or swirled them onwards in grinding packs down the flowing road to the sea.

Not until he was old and experienced in all things did Moosewa master the signs by which the wise ones of the bush knew for a certainty that spring was coming, so insidiously did she creep over the frozen land, so carefully screen her approach. He tried to hear her footsteps as the bears and squirrels did, but always she eluded him and was there before he guessed.

Every year it was the same.

He would lie down at night with ears strained to listen, and it would be winter still. In the morning he would waken to find the trees putting forth buds in promise, and the snow lying only in the hollows and in patches of sheltered grass. Over the tundras was a faint growth of emerald, and from the sky the geese called.

With the memory of the hard days and nights they had seen, endured, and passed, to link together the little band it seemed most natural to Moosewa that the seven of them should roam a summer world under the same leader. But as better weather drifted over the face of the land, lately so harsh and cruel, the moose in ones and twos drifted away also, indifferent to those with whom they had faced life and death in many grisly forms.

First the cows and the calf, streaking off Moosewa knew not how, so silently and secretly did they pass. Next the three-year-old, a nimble, stirring spirit. He was with them at night, browsing on the willow shoots where the river forked into a tiny bight alive with flights of newly-arrived ducks, and in the morning was gone.

Last of all to slip away was the leader—Moosewa's ideal of all that a moose should be, of all he himself hoped to become. The big bull was lean and cadaverous of appearance now, for his horns, soft as putty, had commenced to grow at a great rate, and the drain on his system told.

No leader ever had a more faithful follower. Down every yard of the forest trails Moosewa dogged the big bull closely, and at night slept with one eye open lest he should lose him. It was so odd, this desire of the moose for solitariness. All other of the bush people had paired and hunted together.

By stratagem and never-failing watchfulness the young moose managed to keep in some sort of touch with his companion of the long winter until summer was at hand. Once or twice he lost him in the thick timber, but found him after careful hunting; then one make-believe summer day the big bull swam across a wide lake Moosewa dared not tackle, so vast and unending did its waters seem.

Thus the wonderful creature passed out of his follower's ken.

He was a great leader, the greatest Moosewa

ever had. Calmly self-reliant, never over-confident. That was why the young moose admired him more than he did a still bigger beast whom he tacked on to next winter. *His* enemies so often gave him victory. But the big bull foresaw as no other moose; there was no element of gambling in his schemes, and they always seemed to come out as he had calculated. He would chance very little, and yet when chances had to be taken he took them boldly and fearlessly. There was no half-hearted element in his nature. Moosewa would ever take a leaf out of his book.

The young moose stood gazing out over the lake, uninterested in the lilies shooting up through the shallows. Under a soft, protective casing of velvet, busy living cells were manufacturing quite a creditable pair of miniature antlers. His reflection in the water limned a goodly beast, of already immense proportions. His height at the shoulder topped that of the average four-year-old, and though, like all his tribe, be fell away behind, he was built all over on fine muscular lines.

A tiny humming-bird, who had breasted hundreds of miles and the winds of the North, flickered by on fairy pinions, drenched with rain, and frozen

with the keen air. A tropical alien, belonging to the sun and the radiant South, lily bells, and the stems of roses, it had thought to come in summer, but winter reigned still. Helpless and battered, the wind whirled it into rain-soaked grasses, and beat it, gleaming like a star, into the darkness of an ever-frozen earth.

There the mink found it, with its message of summer and the South, which he could not read. A dead humming-bird! It meant one thing only to him. Minks are the least imaginative of all the bush people.

At least, so the rest of the wilderness folk say.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FOREST KING

"Here's a deer whose skin's a keeper's fee."

As the spring merged into warm summer days, the moose flies wakened to vigorous life, and kept their prey standing for hours at a time in deep water; and from this safe retreat—since he could not sleep all the hours away, or everlastingly drag up lilies by the roots—Moosewa watched the life of the wilderness unfold. All sorts of hitherto unnoticed phases of existence obtruded themselves, little comedies that in other circumstances might have escaped observation.

Just over his head a marten was rearing her family in the nest of a squirrel, callously murdered to make room for the usurper's domestic needs. Whenever he looked up into the wide-armed branches the moose saw two beady eyes watching his every movement, and sometimes, as the marten came down the tree, holding on to the bark with

curving claws, outgrown now from their winter gloves of woolly hair, she showed her teeth and hissed—hissed like a cat.

He rather liked the hissing. It was a tribute to his size and his importance in the bush world. It made him think of himself as a creature to be considered, and took his mind off the constant burn and throb in his small, soft, flat-formed horns.

The perpetual passing to and fro of a large timber wolf wore quite a track along the river-side. Strange that the process of the seasons should so alter his awesome character—in winter a beast to be feared above all others; in summer a furtive, slinking brute, who didn't matter much one way or the other.

And yet the wolf retained many of his cold-weather habits—the crouching trot, and the artful trick of letting his brush trail, so that on snow or sand it obliterated the track of his feet until he reached cover, when he tossed the dragging tail high like a flag of victory.

He made no journey to the secluded cover beneath a large upturned root without a purpose—the moose saw that quite well. If he had nothing to carry home, he remained away. Foxes, rabbits,

birds, any small furred or feathered thing, all were fish to his fine-meshed net. When bringing in food for his mate, the beast trotted crouchingly along the path by the stream; but when he emerged to hunt again, he stole forth with his head turned obliquely, one ear forward and the other back.

And so on to the summer's day, when the she-wolf brought six whelps to drink at the water's edge, and the moose, standing unafraid, but with a sinking at his heart as he thought of the winter ahead, saw them learn to lap, and how to conceal unwanted portions of food by shovelling a hole in the earth with their noses. The malamutes at the post had enough of the dog in them to bury treasure by the aid of their paws. It was curious that their cousins of the wilderness should prefer their noses.

Day after day the lessons went on. Had Moosewa been a wolf himself, he could not have understood more clearly that it is never safe to quit cover without the quick right and left glance, or to leave cover to windward. Wise wolves, who know their wild thoroughly, slink along its margin until the open wind sweeps towards them.

Everywhere some beast or bird had its nursery concealed as carefully as possible from the vigilant eyes of the next-door neighbour.

The wolverine took her walks abroad, followed by two frizzy cubs, covered with soft, cream-coloured hair, replicas, in all but their coats, of their ungainly mother. The ermine, hunting by scent in the runways and galleries of the water-rat, disciplined a dexterous family, who could no more keep together than loose quicksilver. A little striped skunk, in possession of a fox's earth, made its presence known by an acrid smell, that made the porcupine over the way long to evict the nuisance. But he dared not! The skunk's weapon was too deadly. Porcupine quills counted as nothing beside it. Sometimes o' nights the skunk took all eight kittens out at once, and taught them the mincing gait and the calm audacity characteristic of the tribe.

But it was the two otter pups, whose holt was at the bend just beyond his favourite wallowing place, whom Moosewa liked best. They had a water entrance and a land entrance, and the mud slide otters love; and every day the furry things gambolled together on ridiculously short legs, utterly

indifferent to the marvellons swimming feats of their parents, who strove in all manner of ways to rouse a spirit of emulation which should bring the careless atoms hotfoot into the stream. They were quite indifferent. It was well enough for grown-up otters to flash and dart and twist and dive about in the water, and catch fish in mysteriously adroit fashion. What else had grown-up otters to do? For themselves the pups preferred the grass bank. It made a beautiful playground, and there were never-ending games. The water looked strangely deep. Besides, how were they to know that they could swim?

Their mother solved the problem in her own way. When she found that they were not going to take the water of themselves, she crept behind them as they chased one another on its edge, and flung them after each other, far out as the strong, uplifting push of her nose could toss them. Then, diving in herself, she swam between the pups and the bank, resolutely preventing all attempts at landing.

Comedies and tragedies there were on every side. The comedy of the baby otters, which ended in their swimming even better than their parents,

and the tragedy of the ill-natured tuft-eared lynx kitten who fell into the river and was drowned. A lynx kitten who lives on a high bluff overhanging running water should be careful how he scraps and fights.

Then came the rushing movement of the moose love-season, the furious thrashing of the trees, the calling, the clashing of horns as bull met bull in mortal combat, the groans and grunts of the victorious and the beaten. A time of thrills which heralded the first romance in Moosewa's life.

No memory lives so long or so sweetly in the heart as that of a first love. Other loves lesser and greater may to some extent obliterate clear recollection, but something of its song remains. It was that way with the young moose. When he was old, and the panorama of his life lay behind him, and the procession of his long-dead loves moved shadow-like down leafless forest aisles, he remembered!

The mate Moosewa found for himself that autumn was in no way worthy of him. Actuated by the same motive—whatever it may be—which moves so many young human males to fall in love with women old enough to be their mothers, the

young moose became infatuated with a tottering old cow with scarce teeth enough to chew the cud, much less bite off spruce-tops with ease. It was her fifteenth season, and our hero ought to have been moose of the world enough to know that fifteen years, including all the summers and winters, leave a mark. He ought to have known, but did not, or, if he did, it mattered nothing to him.

The cow was resolved to annex him, and following a sort of wearing-down system, which is often tried with just as marked an effect by feminine things elsewhere, caught him out. He never thought he needed her until she told him so, never heeded her presence in the least until he found her blocking every trail.

That he had not to fight for her, that no other moose wanted her, that she was his for the mere taking, never struck the young bull as anything ominous, which shows you how completely unsophisticated and amateurish he was. And the curious part of it all lay in the fact that, though the cow was as plain as plain as possible, and as unintelligent as a beast who had managed to exist for fifteen years could be, she seemed to Moosewa the most desirable of created mates. Indeed,

throughout his later pick-and-choose career he never came upon another cow moose whose discernment seemed so comfortingly acute.

The secret of it all? She flattered him; pandered to his vanity; and, being of the male persuasion, he sopped it up like a sponge. It was a flattery, to begin with, that so old a cow should stoop from her heights to love a young, callow, practically hornless, animal like himself when there were so many magnificent bulls in the forest from which to choose. Being green in judgment, the youngster did not know that the cow's day was gone, that what he had picked out of the wilderness lucky-bag was a sort of throw out, a derelict no other bull admired.

And since he never knew, what matter!

She did not live long enough to let him know, or he must have found out eventually.

They came through the winter, a particularly hard one, all right, yarding up with a bad-tempered old bull, who charged any of the little company who dared cross him in any way, and kept the band together because none of the members had sufficient courage to sheer off; and when spring thawed out the frozen world, and the cows streaked

off to the islets and sheltered brakes, the ancient female remained with Moosewa still. Her calving days were over.

She ended her career ignominously in a tundra bog. A perfect wallowing place it seemed, slushy for three or four feet down, and then frozen beneath, which gave good standing-ground. The weather was open, and a network of subterranean streams undermined the marshlands draining to the river.

Across the desolate tracks of wanderers in the wilderness, by shallow beds, where little pools of sienna-coloured water filled up the gaps made by the wallowing moose of years, the golden plovers, in solitary pairs, with chequered wings, lighted on the expanse tapestried with blazing lupines, yellow anemones, and calypso orchids—a scheme of colour impossible to any artist save Nature.

The drone of many insects, the soft squelch of displaced mud, and the splash of the distant waterfall, lulled the young bull to sleep. He stood with his back to the keen wind blowing over the tundra, swaying slightly as he dozed.

The cow let herself down into the murky depths, and wallowed with grunts of pleasure until the thick mud rose to her middle.

Suddenly a prodigious commotion disturbed the drowsy moose. The cow, panic - stricken, was struggling violently, miring herself deeper with every frantic plunge. She was alarmed to find that her hoofs, seeking the frozen bottom, found nothing but a treacherous marshy substance which gave no foothold. Last year the beds of the tundra pools were firm as any to be found in the lakes and rivers. She was sinking deeper and deeper into the morass each instant.

The bull sniffed the air and backed away, not attempting to investigate the catastrophe. This was a bush pitfall of which he knew nothing.

Was ever so beautiful a scene! On the one side the brown of the far-reaching tundra, dotted with the soft gold of flowers, on the other the torrent singing its insistent song, backed by white vestments of mist enveloping the shadowy groins of the sweep of mountains.

His near presence incited the cow to frenzies of endeavour, but every fresh attempt to extricate herself landed her lower in the mire. She groaned and grunted piteously, and once Moosewa answered in a weak voice he scarce recognized as his own. His breath came quicker. The very air seemed

full of untoward chances, and the ground around him quaked and yawned. There was more in this tundra bog than met the eye of the wisest moose.

Without so much as a backward glance of sympathy, the renegade wheeled about and made off at a lurching trot to the safety of the forest. The booming of the waterfall sounded in his ears like the voice of a comforter. It was the music of his own river. Tundra bogs were not for moose, for caribou only. How warily he would go henceforward!

As he breasted an intervening hill the wild music vibrated in all the air. Then, suddenly, without any warning, the glory of the familiar falls burst on his vision. A great torrent rolled down the precipitous sides of a gigantic granite kloof in exceeding volume, and broke up, descending quite slowly, like snow.

The sun gave a glint to the whiteness which was indescribably beautiful, the etchings were limned so clearly, the colours painted so definitely. At the bottom, where the fall met the river, was an indistinguishable boiling-pot; and the tossed spray arose, enshrouding the falls, and as it lighted on the titanic masses of granite, meeting a different

temperature, it condensed, and formed thousands of tiny cascades in the rocks.

Down the moose trail the lumbering bulk trotted purposefully, without so much as a thought to the tragedy of the tundra.

It was ungallant, it was shameless, cowardly—what you will. Alas ! throughout the whole of his life Moosewa never distinguished himself by standing by the feminine things for whom he had made himself responsible. In a disaster of any magnitude he invariably took the shortest route to safety, and if his cow followed, well and good ; if not, bad and evil—from her point of view !

The old cow sank lower and lower, until her long head lay outstretched on the water like that of a moose swimming. She had ceased to struggle now, she had sunk too deep. Her legs were securely held down in the half-frozen, thick mud.

Her little sunken eyes swept the waste as though seeking something. Then, soundlessly, she disappeared.

That summer, an exceptionally hot, dry one, gave the young bull a glimpse of an insignificant forest fire, the sort of fire Canadians would call a "fizzle." It did not start of itself, as a result of

the sun's heat, but from a chance match thrown into the river grass by a prospector toiling up the river in a dory.

In a dense rampart of closely-growing scrub-bushes near the water's edge Moosewa was asleep, dreaming he was young again, and back on the never-to-be-forgotten islet with his mother. The ominously sounding cracks of the trees wove themselves into the noise of beavers at work on the dam, the curious clicking of the frizzling leaves into the splashing of the lagoon over the stones where the river swirled in.

A drift of smoke passed across the deer's nervously-moving nose, and on the instant the big beast was up and feeling the wind for danger.

Above the arch of the trees a dark pall loomed, obliterating the sky. The crash of a big tree falling drove the moose forward a few paces.

And then he saw the flames!

They swept towards him, grey and red and black, licking up the lichen hanging from the trees. The fire had a good start as it came up the low-growing river scrub, even if the dampness of the forest must soon kill it out.

A wolf, with the hair of his back on end, loped

into the open, turning his head furtively from side to side. He was old and half-blind, or perhaps would not have made the mistake he did, for he sought safety at a point where it was least to be found. Instinct bade him make for water, and instinct, for once, was wrong. It was by the river the fire raged hottest. Without the precaution of the right and left glance of his tribe, the usually wary wolf flung himself forward, thinking himself cut off and surrounded.

The moose stood still irresolute, fascinated by the glare. He, the careless taker of chances, the reckless stampeder, felt in his very bones that the way of escape lay not through the barring flames, but down the smoke-laden aisles behind.

The smell of singeing fur blew ahead of the flames, and a cry that took Moosewa back to the winter plains, the snow, and the stillness, vibrated on the air.

He saw the fire creeping in golden whips up the mosses clinging to the bark of old trees, and the sight stung him to action. Setting his small horns back, he made off pell-mell through the density of the underbrush and the stifling smoke fumes to the safety of the far beyond.

It was nothing of a conflagration really, yet it seemed to the deer a holocaust ; and since the region

was burnt out from the browsing point of view, and useless for a year or two, he took himself far away—to deeper forests, fire-proof and rain-soaked.

* * * * *

The seasons passed—springs, summers, autumns, winters—all very much the same, distinguished only from each other by extra cold spells or unexpected rises in a never very high temperature.

Moosewa was nine years old, at the zenith of his career, lord of the forest, and he knew it. Pride in himself was just as natural a thing to him as a centre is to a circle. With him pride did not go before destruction, nor a haughty spirit before a fall. He knew himself to be invincible. It was a grand sensation, the realization that he was a bull of the rarest bulk, more wonderfully horned, coated, and belled, fleeter and stronger than any other he had ever come across in all his wanderings—a bull, too, with a specialized knowledge of his world which should keep him alive for years.

Warlike bulls in the mating season, when as a rule reason abdicates, looked narrowly at the belligerent monster before engaging him in battle.

> "Conquest is not given by chance,
> But, bound by fatal and resistless merit,
> Waits on his arms."

Moosewa always won. How could such a mammoth be beaten?

A hint of the superlative quality of his horns percolated far down the coast. Trappers who had seen his huge form flash across the snow or lumber between the dark boles of the trees compared his antlers with those of other acceptedly fine specimens, and conjectured what they must span. One chagrined hunter, who had got in a long-distance shot at the big bull during the previous autumn, declared that he had undoubtedly missed a moose whose horns exceeded eighty inches spread. Nobody believed him, and nobody thought him a liar either, for just as dirt is nectar in the process of evolving, so a trapper is often an observer born out of his time.

In winter now our hero was the boss bull of his own yards, which he planned out on devious and thoroughly negotiable lines of his own. This season he had his last year's cow with him, and a feeble calf, who showed no signs of ever being a repetition of his father.

The yards, in excellent travelling condition—for the moose company was a large one—ran perilously near to a lengthy trap-line; but the wandering

deer feared nothing. In the immensity of the space and remoteness it seemed impossible that any human agency could exist.

They were lying down, tails to windward, huddled together for warmth, when a strange tainted air swept down, and brought the leader to his stiltlike legs. His alarm roused the band, and realizing that some unknown danger threatened, the moose moved off briskly, fast as they could, over a difficult surface.

A flying figure skimmed lightly over the snow, and at the crack of a rifle the smallest calf, lagging behind, hurried out of a frozen world. A lucky kill, but to a hungry trapper, who has also baits to supply, a moose calf means very little.

It was Moosewa the trapper wanted—Moosewa, the size of whose hoof-marks straightway decided the hunter on following them up, and supported the hurriedly formed idea that here was a bull who must carry a head worth the taking. Even if the antlers so quickly scanned deceived so practised a judge, his skin was "a keeper's fee," and his carcass would mean a sufficiency of beef for the winter.

He stalked the band day after day, creeping near

as he dared to the edge of the yards, fearing always to risk a chancy shot lest he drove the beasts out into the open and far beyond the confines of a region he had more or less explored. Once, as he thought his prize as good as won, he came almost face to face with a cow moose, which had been screened from view by a patch of thick bushes, and almost as he caught sight of her she was off at a gallop across the open ground, uttering a loud cry as she went, which gave the warning.

So quickly did the whole thing happen that the hunter had no time to get in a shot ere the big bull disappeared, and realizing that the startled animals were off on a big stampede, he turned his attention to his trap-line, economizing his blood-thirst. Had it been past the time of the horn-shedding, he would have resorted to the often successful loop-snare arranged on a well-beaten trail—a scheme beloved of trappers, and not to be considered as unsporting in the least, or at any rate not so unsporting as the luring of a beast into the presence of a hunter by an artificial mating cry. There's something rotten in the state of Denmark *there!*

In a kind of amble, which in fleetness equalled a gallop, the moose travelled over a snowy upland

which led to a desolate valley, sombre from its narrowness, with high, spruce-grown sides, and an insignificant rivulet, one of the sources of the Sushitna, running down the centre.

Making his way along with some difficulty, bridging the snow-drifts sometimes in floundering jumps, the careful leader, who would call no halt as yet, led the band through a dense mist sweeping down from the glaciers. Suddenly a phantom form loomed up—a young bull moose, who, after many preliminaries of investigation, thrust his companionship on the company. It was difficult in a fog which hid objects twenty paces off to form any correct idea of his size, but barring a lesser span of horn, he did not at first sight appear of much less bulk than the giant leader himself.

He was a brave spirit, the chance-comer, and contested the sovereignty of the yards almost at once, questioning the big deer's omnipotence, and trying to take on himself the ordering of things. Moosewa stood the interference patiently enough for awhile, and then, since impertinence may be carried too far, set about ousting the usurper.

He had ample warning. The grunting, deep challenge note bade him make ready.

It would be a good fight, thought Moosewa, who loved good fights no less than good fighters. But he overestimated his rival's capacity, and had the best of the battle from the onset. Indeed, if the newcomer had not possessed the stoutest of stout hearts, the series of petty squables would have ended suddenly as they began. That was the worst of it. The claimant would not acknowledge defeat. Moosewa had to administer a lesson.

It was such a fight as made even the uninterested moose company cease ruminating and draw together, such a fight as the valley had never seen, and always the larger bull got his enemy in some vulnerable spot and escaped himself unscathed.

So intent were the two warriors on the combat that they threw caution to the winds, and did not heed a greater danger than that which stood immediately in front.

For the trapper had come up with them again. As he threaded his noiseless way through dense patches of dwarf underwood, in an effort to throw out a new line of traps, he came on places where the moose had stopped to browse, showing that they were not then travelling very fast. A little farther, and the sound of rushing bodies met his

skilled ears, the crash of horns, and the imperative snorts which tell so much. Listening carefully, the man judged that one bull was having much the best of the fray, and was driving the other before him. Soon he came upon the spot where the combat commenced, as was clearly evidenced by the trampled snow and broken bushes.

Following up the sounds, he came within sight of the great deer, who were moving rapidly, and tried a long shot, missing both beasts ignominiously, but was not disconcerted. Experience had taught him that stiff-handed shooting is useless with the rushing moose, and that to be successful one must aim well in front of the quarry, following the beast with the rifle. And this had been impossible.

The attempt had its effect, though. In the general *sauve qui peut* following on the crack of the rifle, Moosewa took to the open, since the narrow yards were congested by flurried amblers getting in each other's way.

The leader was parted from his company—all the hunter desired. The snow was just of the right consistency for snow-shoes, which meant a disadvantage to the deer, who put on the pace as he realized he was pursued.

It is not often that the beauties of Nature cause forgetfulness of the trapper's trade. A man may be full of appreciation in the comfort of a trading-post, with the results of his months of hard labour in his hand, and may then feel like dilating on the wonders of the wild ; but the average fur-gatherer, hunting alone, physically fatigued and lonely beyond powers of telling, cares little for the grandeur of the grandest scene.

Yet, perhaps, because he was bred in one of the gardens of the earth, this trapper found his sense of beauty stronger than his weariness.

He paused a moment and drank it in.

Everywhere the radiant brightness of the snow was spangled with the rosy glow, called by the Swiss " Alpine Gluehn," exquisite blazing shades, luminous and prismatic, changing constantly. Afar was the unending vista of the everlasting snowfields, with frozen Niagaras descending to the valleys, beryl-like, and glinting rose-coloured, too.

Just overhead eight bald-headed eagles were a-wing, flying low in the wide undulating sweeps that tell so eloquently of the eternal quest.

Between the scanty pines the moose sped, a beautiful picture of purposeful action, every nerve

taut, horns laid well back, making his bid for safety. The trapper's momentary abstraction had given the pursued a chance, for breaking a fresh trail through deep snow is not the sort of an adventure a moose seeks readily. When several yard up together, it is always understood that in trail breaking they relieve each other by turns.

The man was gaining, there could be no doubt of that. If the moose had a clear run of a few hundred yards, the next fifty caused him to lose the advantage. He could not, try as he would, cast off the figure with the wings of Mercury upon his feet.

Down a gulch where the wind drove slantingly and bitterly cold, the trapper put up his hand in its fur mitt to his cheek on the windward side. He felt no pain, but the ominous numbness was there, and he had been frost-bitten, or frosted, as they call it in Alaska, before. It frightened him somewhat. It was all very well to think of the common remedy of rubbing the infected part with snow. Too often had he seen the frozen skin give way in the process, and so worsen what was done.

He pulled up short in his headlong flight as the numbness deepened, and turned regretfully shack-

wards, with only one idea in his mind—to get the frost out. He saw the distant moose vanish over the horizon—he seemed to take it in a mighty bound—saw the certain chops and steaks disappear, the wonderful head, and the desirable skin.

And in wide, strong sweeps, he struck out light-footed for "home."

CHAPTER IX

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"Pursu'd by hunger-starved wolves."
Henry VI.

He had outdistanced his pursuer of the swift snow-shoes at last, and sinking down beneath a giant fir, whose branches hung in a curiously graceful downward sweep as they supported an incalculable weight of snow, the big moose, with every nerve tingling and afire, stretched out his weary limbs to rest, looking like some misshapen mammoth of the past—a weary mammoth, burdened by an eighty pound coronal.

On the crisp air came an eerie whimper, low at first, but very insistent, and gathering in volume each instant. It brought the moose to his feet—he knew what it meant quite well. The wolves were out, calling, calling to one another. From every point of the compass the cry resounded, and, with a stab at his heart, which passed into a sick

feeling of strengthless terror, the tired animal heard the confused howls of the hungry pack change to the kill-call.

O-o-o-o-h-h-h ! O-o-o-o-h-h-h ! W-a-a-a-h-h-h ! W-a-a-a-h-h-h !

Once more his life hung on the balance of the scales.

If he could keep to the soft snow lying beneath the trees he might yet escape, for the wolves know well that a moose on unfrozen snow is more than a match for the speediest, and, though tired and exhausted, the great deer had still a few miles in hand. After their limit—what then !

In proportion to his huge bulk the moose has extremely small feet, quite unlike those of the caribou, whose large false hoofs and deeply-cleft toes carry him at a terrific pace over a lightly-frozen surface, which would let down a moose to his thighs instantly. A very thin crust suffices to hold up a wolf—many wolves—and under such conditions the game in moose-hunting is all to the strenuous pack.

The moose knew the procedure well. He had never seen it illustrated, but the instinct and traditions of all time had taught him. After running

down the quarry, the largest of the wolves, conducting a systematic and well-planned attack, jump at the deer's head, confusing him, at the same time avoiding the driving blows of the powerful antlers and razor hoofs, the while other wolves of lesser fighting degree endeavour to cut the unguarded hamstrings.

With the death fear surging through his veins, rising to his throat, and almost choking him, and muscles aching from long-continued strain, the moose made off in a pacing gait, like that of a trotting horse, striving as he went to choose a path which should not let him down. Here and there the snow, banked up by the wind, formed solid walls that barred his progress; now and again a heavy torrent, dull-sounding under its coverlet of ice, turned the hunted creature aside. He to whom in times of peace the strongest rampart the bush can build meant nothing at all, now felt his impotency.

The tremendous vitality which carried him through anything was going; he felt it ebbing, with each laboured breath. Rotten roots, deep-buried, sought to trip him up; branches of trees, upholding streaming trains of snow, let down their

avalanches to check his onward rush, and wind-mained limbs of shadowy pines stretched out murderous arms for his throat. His own world fought against him.

It was very light. A full moon shone through the gaunt forest, flinging checkered shadows across the snow. The going was easier now. Instinctively the moose knew that he was on a well-defined trail—a trail not made by the bush people. It was a trap-line, marked out by blazed trees. Once, as he crashed through a closely-grown thicket, he felt his off fore-leg caught in a loop attached to a pole placed across the path—a lynx snare, which gave way before the strain as though it were contrived of sewing-cotton.

No other animal was moving—he had the world to himself, he and the wolves. In so severe a snap the fur-bearers, not by any means impervious to weather conditions, remain in the warmest corner they can find until the temperature rises.

An open, treeless plateau, on which an apparently hard crust was formed by the action of the sun's heat, which had melted the surface, to freeze hard again in the pitiless extreme of the night, lay ahead, and the moose sped forward gallantly. For some

distance the crusted snow held, then—suddenly—at every step he went through. He rose again, fell, rose once more, on, on.

The treacherous plateau lay behind, but the powerful gait was broken now, and the harried beast lurched as he ran.

O-o-o-o-h-h-h ! O-o-o-o-h-h-h ! W-a-a-a-h-h-h ! W-a-a-a-h-h-h !

He heard them coming, big sleuth-hounds and strong, ten or a dozen of them, not more—the wolves of Alaska never mass together in the vast packs in which their brethren of Russia are said to hunt—sweeping across the surface of the snow in a compact body, whimpering, with a dry, patter, patter of feet.

On went the moose, head well up still, carrying his mighty antlers along his flanks, drawing his breath in sobbing pants. He went on because the desperate flight had become an almost mechanical action. It had lasted so long that it was easier to go on than to pull up—he would go on until he was overpowered. And he was doomed; he realized that. There were so many wolves. Had he been fresh, he would have made a great fight of it, for he was ever a fighter. But the hours of harrying had

made an armed resistance impossible. He was done.

Then, with a plunge of his heart, he caught the flare of a golden something shining through the bare skeletons of phantom trees—something that made his courage rise and glow again, something brilliant and bright and very beautiful, something that lit up the sky and put out the stars.

It was, it must be, the fire-devil before which he had fled in summer. He had feared it then, but this time he was not afraid. It had come to save him. If he could but bear to pass through its sting and its scorch, and its flaming, dancing tongues, and gain the other side, he might frustrate his enemies yet. The wolves would not face the fire-devil. Their courage stopped at that. And the smell of singeing fur and the death-cry of the grey wolf came back to the moose again.

Near a large clump of trees, to which a trail was cut through the snow, stood a roughly built log cabin, some twelve feet square. All the crevices between the logs were chinked with moss and earth, which, laid on thickly, made the roof, through which a shaky stove-pipe poked, giving outlet to a spiral of smoke. Earth to a considerable height

banked the bottom of the cabin to prevent the cold from penetrating; the hinged door was evidently cut out with a cross-saw after the walls were completed, and therefore fitted exactly. The window, too, in which a piece of linen soaked in candle grease did duty for glass, had been cut in the same fashion.

In front of the shack, a few feet away, blazed a huge wood fire, before which the cased and stretched skins of many animals—foxes, wolverines, martens, ermines, and beavers—were drying off. An unskinned lynx hung on a tree some two hundred yards away, frozen stiff, with his large cushioned feet extended. He hung there for the most prosaic of reasons—until the fleas, which infest the lynx tribe in myriads, died for lack of the warmth to which they were accustomed, or became sufficiently comatose to be shaken off the rigid carcass, which had been strung up for three days already, and would be for three more.

The trapper was wise in his generation, and knew the vitality of the swarming enemies. Were he to take the stiff body into the log shack too soon, and thaw it out for skinning, every one of the insects would thaw too, and become as lively

as ever. He had skinned lynx before, so went warily.

From the dim recesses of the hut a fur-clad figure emerged into the flickering light of the fire, whose lurid glare gave the trapper's eagle features a wild, rough beauty almost unearthly.

"Wal!" he said aloud. "Wal!" and started at the sound.

Living alone in the forests for months together had made his own voice strange to him. Sometimes he found himself repeating his name over and over, lest he forgot.

"Cretney, Cretney, Cretney."

One day was so like another, that unless he took the precaution of notching a stick, Crusoe-fashion, they telescoped, and became inextricably mixed. He only knew that every day was doomsday. His time-table hung on the door, and counting up the little incisions carefully he realized that the last marked his birthday.

It made him laugh. His birthday!

His thoughts flew back to "the lil' islan'," and the days when birthdays counted, before he had "grown-up," and the bottom dropped out of the world.

He was dressed as a trapper, but once again saw himself in a thick blue-knitted jersey, with trousers of homespun, and big, well-greased sea-boots reaching to his knees. The smell of the ocean, and the scent of the gorse blew through the ice-bound woods.

He moved silently, like the fur-bearing creatures he hunted. One by one he gathered up the pelts on the cases and stretchers, upon which they were retained in positions which would prevent shrinkage as the moisture evaporated, and took them into the shack.

Coming out again, he threw an armful of inflammable pine-needles on to the embers for the sheer pleasure of seeing the sparks dancing upwards in a flame of gold. He did this religiously every night. It had come to be a solemn rite, a tender memorizing of a long-gone day when prisoned wood-fairies clamoured for release and childish hands brought succour.

And the moose was travelling to the light. He knew now that it was no forest fire, but something to do with the two-legged creatures who thinned the bush of its people. Whatever it might be, it seemed to him less cruel, less to be feared, than the Fate which crept on from behind.

O-o-o-o-h-h-h! *O-o-o-o-h-h-h!* *W-a-a-a-h-h-h!* *W-a-a-a-h-h-h!*

The trapper stood rigid in the doorway, fingering his rifle, which stood ready to his hand. He had never heard the grim call of wolves in pack. It gripped his heartstrings strangely, and turned his blood to ice. He thought himself a rock, immovable, and lo! the grisly sound on the night wind unnerved him. The fire was high, luckily. He would close the door.

From the depths of the dimly outlined forest a derelict bulk emerged, rolling helplessly from side to side, spent, and panting in deep breaths that cut the silence like a cry. Sometimes the shadowy form lurched and almost fell, then rallied and struggled on again. And it was always to the light it came. Fascinated, through the half-open door, the trapper watched.

Right up to the shack the stricken beast made its way, seeking from man the mercy the creatures of the wilderness denied. The small, pitiful, sunken eyes of the big deer looked into the steely grey ones fixed in astonished amaze, asking, begging, beseeching, praying.

A sufficiency of moose meat for weeks lay ready

to his rifle. Noiselessly the man laid his weapon down upon the ground which made his floor.

"There, old boy, there!" he said soothingly, not attempting to touch his massive guest, as he could so easily have done, for fear of driving him away.

The moose leant heavily against the walls of his sanctuary, with drooping head, and palmated horns rising like a fence about his scarcely moving ears. A cloud of steam hung about him. Then, as though they could sustain the weighty body no longer, his legs gave way, and the big beast sank to the ground.

Skirting the prone bulk carefully, the trapper made up the fire again quickly, with the fear of the wolves in his haste. He listened—he could hear nothing. They had passed; the fire was too much for them. All around was the unbroken silence of the dark and frozen North. There is no silence quite like it. An eagle owl screeched once, and the small, unequal sound seemed but to accentuate the awful solemnity of the deathly quiet.

All night the man kept up the fire, and all night the moose slept, as spent warriors sleep, heavily, dreaming of summer on a bed of snow. Once or twice the trapper crept up close and viewed his

guest. Never before had he seen such horns, which, as his knowledge told him, had just about reached their maximum development. With skilled, appraising eye, he measured them roughly, counting the points one by one. There were twenty-eight—fifteen on one side, thirteen on the other.

There was a spread across the palms, which were very white in colour, of certainly seventy-six inches. The points, too, were peculiarly finely formed, and instead of being the stubby affairs one often sees on moose antlers, were quite sharp and tapering.

Could he but get this weighty trophy to the nearest trading-post, he knew that any dealer, with an eye to a profitable scheme of wall decoration for some New York club, or the furtherance of the ambition of a would-be sportsman, would bid a hundred dollars or more.

As he looked down at the wonderful drooping head, he felt a twinge of tenderness. He did not know it for tenderness, because tenderness and trappers have not, in the fitness of things, a bowing acquaintance. He had accounted for hundreds of animals—he lived by death—and yet the sight of this deer which had so trusted him,

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which so boldly claimed a share of that hospitality that has no equal anywhere, moved him strangely.

It was very extraordinary, very curious. Had anyone told him of the incident he would have laughed at it for a trapper's yarn, one of many similar yarns, "natural history incidents" the men from the back of beyond reel off during the lurid two months a year spent in what, for want of a better name, they call "civilization."

Ten months they spend in the woods and two in a trading-post—trapping during the winter, at the trading-post in late spring. Back they go to the distant locality selected in summer, and knock together the shacks, placed along the miles of trap-lines in autumn. Always the same for years.

Yes, he had heard many such tall yarns as this; had told as good himself. Yet here he was face to face with an extraordinary reality. It was no dream. There lay the moose, probably the same animal after whom he had sped on snow-shoes throughout the day.

And somehow he felt that his hand could never be against the moose tribe any more—the Law of the Bush would forbid. More than once he had

stood in the Valley of the Shadow, and passed to safety through the aid of others. He recognized the unusual claim of brotherhood this night's incident made upon him, and as the huddled mass grunted contentedly in the warmth of the fire, the master words of the Mowgli, of whom the trapper had never heard, stirred dimly in his brain:

"We be of one blood, Thou and I!"

The wind ruffled the thick, dark, winter coat, on-ending the long hair, and smoothed it down again gently. A strange line over which the hair did not grow arrested the trapper's attention, and that he might see more clearly he picked out a flaming fir torch from the fire and held it over the rounded quarter of the sleeping moose.

N. R.

Clear cut, gnarled as a deep incision in the bark of a tree gnarls up, the letters stood out.

After all the years the man recognized the brand. And the scene changed to the far-off corral, the struggling little calf, and the red-haired tatterdemalion. He remembered!

"Wal!" he said. His one catapultic word for any situation. "Wal!"

Night was over, and the gentle fingers of dawn stirred the forest into life.

One by one the stars, marguerites in a sea of ultramarine, went out, and little filmy clouds, crimson and rose, golden and blue, banked the horizon. In the transparency of the atmosphere the trees, in fretted silhouette, stood gaunt and desolate, and down the trail the vaporous night mists tiptoed before the wind swinging down from the ice-bound mountain-tops.

It blew the snow in powdery whiteness over the body of the moose as he lay at the closed door of the shack, with his breath frozen on his lips, and tiny icicles clinging to the splendid tassel of hair below his swelling throat.

A gust of wind, stronger than all that had blown before, shook the door. The stove-pipe, resigning duty suddenly, slid from its place on the roof-top and crashed down on to the drooped head of the sleeping moose, wakening him with a start. He was on his feet instantly, looking about him in a haze of sleep, with every nerve taut for immediate flight.

Tense and rigid, he stood for a moment as though carved in stone, holding his rounded nose

high in the air, with the luminous morning light shining full on his head, and outlining every graceful contour of his massive body. Then, of a sudden, knowledge of some unseen presence broke on his clouded brain ; the breeze carried the dread human scent to the sniffing nostrils. A visible tremor shook the big beast, and, gathering himself together, he turned in a flurried circle.

Crash ! The huge horns struck the log projections at the corner of the shack. The left-hand sweep of leaf-like formation tottered, and it fell to the snow like a broken-winged eagle. The time for the shedding had come, and the blows sustained during the mad rush through the forest the night before had hastened Nature's time-table by hours only.

The moose shook his head violently ; it felt ill-balanced, reminding him of a winter in which he had spent a week half-horned, when no thrashing of the trees would rid him of his odd adornment.

Soundlessly the right horn slipped down his shoulder, and lay dark against the whiteness around. Then, like a grey wraith, the big moose vanished in the shadows of the forest, and was gone.

The door of the shack opened against the driven snow. The trapper, ready to go out on his lengthy trap-line, stood looking at the place where the moose had lain. His eyes followed the animal's tracks, and fell on the giant horns.

His hands closed on the polished points. He fingered the wonderful branched palmations, trying to think of them as having been tender, pliable, pulsing with life—to believe that busy living cells had made them—and all for him!

"Wal!" he said, at last. "Wal!"

CHAPTER X

THE LONE TRAIL

"Thou knowest winter tames man, woman, and beast."
Taming of the Shrew.

"Under this thick green brake we'll shroud ourselves;
For through this laund anon the deer will come."
Henry VI.

CRETNEY'S trap-line was a lengthy one, far longer than any usually worked by one man. It took more than a week to traverse from end to end, which was one reason why the wolverines of the neighbourhood kept in such excellent condition. They followed the marten-hunter faithfully as he went his round, not because they liked the taste of marten, but from sheer depravity, a desire to steal bait, and tear trapped beasts to bits and bury them in the snow for the foxes to unearth. Clever and suspicious enough to detect the presence of any sort of a trap, the "gluttons" themselves rarely fell victims. When, by some extraordinary mischance,

they did so, it was not their way to sit and calmly wait for death after the fashion of the lynx. Very frequently their purposeful onslaughts on the pole to which the chain of the trap was attached ended in the half-freedom of the wild. Trap and wolverine, they vanished together over untraversed snows.

Far into the mountains the trap-line penetrated, and almost all the ground yielded good results, being little hunted. Cretney was lucky, too, trapping on original methods of his own, defying many of the traditional systems. One of those rare souls Byron told us of, "a wild bird and a wanderer," his temperament and his fellowship with Nature taught him the ways of the beasts, and put into his mind all sorts of rarely-thought-of schemes for securing the pelts he wanted.

In the extreme cold the rotten fish-baits, which in open weather enticed the craftiest animal, froze up, and, losing their penetrating odour, became ineffectual. Then the trapper turned to the quickly evaporating scent-baits—castoreum, oil of anise, and the rest.

Dead-falls of various kinds he utilized, all of which took time to construct, besides a cruel

device for ensnaring martens. Far back in a small hole in a tree a few feet from the ground an attractive bait was laid, and near the edge of the aperture two nails arranged, with their points slanting inwards. The marten could get his head in and seize the lure, but when it came to backing out with his booty the spikes impaled him.

Six hundred and fifty snares, traps, and deadfalls take some looking after, and disappointments were many. A heavy fall of snow might prevent the trap springing just as a valuable fur-bearer tried for the bait, or a bait became too much frozen to attract, or rabbits ran down the line, and in ensnaring themselves spoilt the trapper's chance of securing more worth-having game—there were so many things. But the thrill of the occupation, which always seemed to Cretney to have something of the excitements and uncertainties of hunting for eggs in a stackyard magnified a hundredfold about it, never staled. There was a wealth of magic and interest in the most humdrum hunting days. If many yielded nothing at all, he was not discouraged. There was always something to learn. When he first took to the woods the simplest natural history facts were unknown to

him, and he wondered why the mink and the marten and the ermine travelled jumping, and alighted so circumspectly that their hind-feet exactly covered the spot just vacated by the fore, and why the long hair at the back of the wolverine's fetlock was designed, as it unmistakably was, to alter the shape of his track in the snow. But now the bush people kept few secrets from him; he had wrested most of them.

The weather changed, and for a week the world lay so frozen that it was well-nigh useless to go out on the trap-line—the fur-bearers would be lying up so close. The hours in the shack dragged by in sleep, in baking a rough variety of bread from ancient yeast-cakes and flour, in counting gains and averaging losses, in thawing out stiffly-frozen rabbits for food, and in fixing traps ready for setting. Those designed for the foxes the man never touched with bare hands, lest some scent of him might cling.

Moosewa's horns lay derelict in a corner. They had been measured carefully, and try as he would in his desire not to over-estimate, the trapper could not make them less than eighty inches in span. A noble trophy, and though in the subsequent

drying, and in spite of wedges adroitly fixed, the measurement would surely reduce itself two inches or so, the antlers would for ever stand as unusually valuable, picked specimens.

At the first hint of improved conditions the trapper prepared for his round, towing his sleigh behind him. For the first two miles the traps set alongside the trail yielded nothing. The quaint little three-sided, stick-roofed houses, like doll's houses in the wilderness, built to conceal the marten and mink-traps, were empty, and the bait frozen to a wooden nothingness. He set the snares afresh, placed new bait at the back of each doll's house, and looked to the chain and pole attachment concealed beneath the snow.

For the lynx he rarely built a shelter-house, but sometimes constructed a low stockade, wherein he set the trap. For the suspicious fox nothing at all but an upstanding stick rubbed over with castoreum, and a trap artfully hidden at the foot.

The first pelt of the morning was that of a fine lynx. He was sitting down waiting, waiting, with the terrible, deadly patience of all trapped lynxes; and when his ensnarer sped towards the trap, the

beautiful, hungry beast on-ended every hair, and crouched for the spring which could not come off.

Cutting down a birch pole five feet or so in length, the trapper, having a first-hand knowledge of the ways of cats, caught the thin-skulled creature a blow on the head, which ended his career.

In his early days of hunting Cretney had once tried to kill a trapped lynx at close quarters with one of the light axes trappers always carry, and he bore traces of the fracas yet. The lynx had not waited for the blow to fall, but shot forward, all impeded as he was, and clung to the hunter's leg, clawing and scratching. When at last the chance of getting in a swinging cut presented itself, the axe fell with such force that the lynx had no skull left, and yet his teeth still clung. One of many experiences, and an object lesson in how to approach a cornered enemy.

Taking the trap-line in his giant stride, a hornless moose swung across the path, his huge form outlined across the luminous abbreviated horizon. Looking after him carefully, with keen, practised eyes, the trapper noted the handsome swinging bell, that of a bull in his prime, and the unfinished appearance of the massive head.

His friend of a few nights agone, perhaps; and thinking so, he did not take the chance of a long shot, but watched the big bull dash away in the thickly-growing trees, tossing up the dry snow as he fled.

It seemed to Moosewa that he was "marked down." Could he never clear the trails of man? First the trapper, then the wolves; the trapper again, and yet again. He did not recollect enough of the night of sanctuary to remember aught more than that he had looked a human in the face. He had not forgotten the alertness of those grey eyes, eyes something like Lucivee's, just as keen and cold and steely. They had softened for the deer curiously, but—he did not want to look in them again. All his desire now was to gather together the remnants of his scattered forces, and get through the remainder of the winter in company. He was big enough and strong enough to fight his way through alone, but the chill, fierce solitudes were very dreary; the loneliness caught him out.

He had to face it, though, and bear it, too, for, travel as he would, trail-break as he might, he could not find a wandering moose band without

a leader, and he flouted the idea of placing himself under the direction of a lesser beast than himself. He might fight for the mastery, but now his head was hornless, his weapons were his hoofs only, and in tribal warfare the value set on hoofs is not high.

The gloominess of his solitude was increased by the winter hush, which lay unbroken on the white wilderness. There was no sound at all. Even to an animal versed in loneliness and silence, so dismal a stillness was inexpressibly solemn.

Now and again he heard a distant footfall rattling over the hard surface of the snow, and he would travel as fast as he could to intercept it, only to have the wayfarer elude him between the sombre stark avenues. Here and there he came on the further results of Cretney's presence—a fox, perhaps, dragging his trap towards freedom, only to be held up by the pole attachment becoming inextricably mixed up, as it was designed to do, in low-growing scrub; or an Arctic hare, the rabbit of native nomenclature, caught in a wire noose set in his runway.

Then the sweet o' the year came in again, when it seemed never so far away, and the lake broke up,

the wilderness thawed out, and the foxes and the wolves, unheeding of the market value of their coats, wore them into disastrous bare patches. No other beasts did so much sitting down and gazing about, not even the lynx, whose glossy coat required constant attention.

The ducks came back and nested as of yore in the marshlands; the swallows, too, and the loons, without whom spring would not have been spring at all.

Lying in a deep brake of decaying bracken, the big bull, in his wanderings through the forest, came across a tiny moose calf, aged about a day. It reminded him of his long-gone self, and his eyes dwelt curiously on the little creature. Though so youthful, it understood the art of mimicry, or its mother understood it for it. Placed where it was, the colours blended so perfectly, so entirely harmoniously, that any calf, however active, must be safe from human detection. Only the forest dwellers would take the tiny one for anything but a broken tree-stump.

When Moosewa would pass on, his new friend would none of it; and, untucking his long legs gravely, he prepared to set out for the Great

Unknown. Just as the bull was persuading the calf to stay where he was by freezingly ignoring his attentions, the cow returned from pasture.

She came rushing, crying a little, half in comfort, half in longing, and caught a glimpse of a big moose streaking off through the green. A goodly beast, she recognized that. Her son would be just such another!

And somewhere about this time was fought the battle of the lynxes, such a fight as was never seen, the sort of fight that marks an era. Other lynx quarrels there had been, of course, fierce contests that blazed up and ended in a minute or two, but this, this to the death affray, kept the wilderness agog for a week.

There was little to choose between the combatants. The lynx, who lived in the high bluff above the river, sharing it with the swallows, had perhaps a slight advantage over his enemy, whose home was in the roots of the dead hemlock across the lagoon; but the long, exhausting swim equalized that, for it was the larger cat who sought the other.

A small object could be discerned crossing the dividing breadth of water unwaveringly, now lost in the midst of gaily-painted paddling ducks, who

scattered in long lines or rose to fly shorewards; now fearlessly dodging a belated ice-floe fallen from the glacier that tumbled down to the water's very edge in a broad highway leading to the skies.

It emerged presently on to a flat table-rock, and woke the echoes with a caterwaul so piercingly shrill that the sound penetrated to the forest's heart, and made the energetic little squirrels collecting pine-cones in the long grass drop their spoils and take to the tree-tops.

Lucivee of the high bluff stood on his table-rock dripping, convinced of his ability to whip his own weight and more. He looked very lithe, and elegant, and graceful, with his peculiar neck-ruff stiffened, and the black pencils of his ears erect.

A tortured wailing from the thorns, screams growing more desperate as the enemies crept closer to each other down dark tunnels leading to the water made by the small game of all generations. Flies in myriads buzzed around the damp bushes, and infinitesimal midges hung in clouds over rotten tree-stumps, and circled about the nodding moose-grass plumes.

It took both animals quite an appreciable time to work through the initial stages of the combat.

Lynxes, like our domestic fireside cats, are tremendous sticklers for the science of a fight, for a set system of tactics. Fools rush in and win, too, sometimes, but never lynxes. There are the feints and crouches, the pretended indifferences, the "I don't want to fight, but by Jingo if I do!" observances to be played out, and it is lengthy work. Very often, by the time one or other of the combatants is ready to deal the first stroke, he finds no enemy left to fight. Disappointing, of course, but at least the science of cat-fights had been regarded.

A strangled cry, sharp and sudden, told the smaller forest people that the affray had commenced.

From somewhere in the alder thicket near the water came a soft purring drone, rising and falling, now loud, now soft, but always with a strange incentive in its luring hum. It turned the cats Berserk. Their lithe bodies whipped the ground as their hold of one another tightened, and their razor talons tore and slashed wildly.

Once the lesser lynx got in a telling stroke, which practically forced out his enemy's eye—a great moment. Pride in himself put him momentarily off his guard. He forgot everything but the

crippling blow he had dealt as he drew himself up free. What a fine hand he had played! How subtle! How well managed!

But in the lynx world, as in ours, credit one takes is seldom deserved. We take credit to ourselves to bolster up hope, to counterbalance our liabilities. Unfortunately, no animal is its own auditor, and the gods only accept items that pass muster.

Lucivee of the bluff, sick with pain and mad with anger, seized his opportunity and his opponent too, and getting him somewhere near the neck, held on, held on. . . .

Over and over the spitting, spluttering cats rolled, the lesser ever seeking to protect the vital spot sought by his enemy. Inch by inch the fatal teeth crept nearer.

The cries grew fainter; now the warriors only hummed drowsily, save when the tabby in the bushes called.

Exhausted and blinded though he was, the larger lynx, summoning all his strength, let go his grip of his enemy's back, and caught it again nearer the neck. Little by little he got an unshakable hold. He felt the warm body beneath stiffening.

It was over—the fight was over. Lucivee of the bluff had conquered. Lucivee of the thicket did not exist.

The tabby advanced from her retreat, well-groomed, sleek, and purring. She passed by the stretched body of her late admirer callously—a dead cat merely! The hero of the fight sat blinking his one eye in the sunlight waiting for her. He knew she would come, for it is thus that Nature rewards all well-graced players.

They swam back across the lagoon together, climbing to the high bluff among the swallows.

And the big moose, standing noiselessly in the shallows, wallowing now and again deep, deep into the squelching mud, watched and listened as he had watched and listened a hundred times, for, if the end was sometimes different, the tale was always the same.

He was dreadfully harassed by the moose flies, who descended on him in the forest from all sides; they almost forbade travelling in the woods at all. When he would eat, the enemies attacked him in such overwhelming numbers that he was glad to get into the water once more. Sometimes they even made him wonder whether the winter was not

a better season than the time of flowers, of the sounds of birds, and the silver flash of salmon running upstream; and then again he knew that there was no time like Alaskan summer-time, with its joys of creeping dawn, and the silvery haze that floated on the lake and crept ghostly through the pathless woods.

He might have been a hippopotamus about this time instead of a moose—the days he spent in the water. There he stood for hours and hours at a stretch, idly pulling up the lily roots and ruminating, or gazing across at the beaver colony busily trying to deflect a tributary streamlet from its course. He was always interested in beavers; but for them the marshlands would dry up, and the moose-grass cease to grow.

Later he established a sort of suzerainty over his own particular bit of the forest, so that no other bull moose dared frequent it without permission. It took some time to impress this upon his brethren, but after a while they accepted the situation, and, bar coming down to the water to drink occasionally, the lesser ones of his tribe yielded up the freedom of the wild corner unmurmuringly.

CHAPTER XI

WHERE THE WAYS DIVIDE

"Let me not live
After my flame lacks oil, to be the snuff
Of younger spirits."

All's Well that End's Well.

THE moose was now eleven years old, two years on the wrong side of perfection, but his noble antlers showed no signs of dwindling. Indeed, if it were possible, they were finer, more perfectly spread, symmetrical, and massive than those he carried at nine years of age.

The natives have it—and there is much fact muddled up with native fancies—that the larger the moose the longer it takes to get his horns clean. Though fairly late in the season, Moosewa's antlers had not long been out of velvet, and still needed a lot of thrashing against bushes to rid them of adhering scraps.

His once long-haired hanging bell was nothing

now but a shrunken piece of loose skin, which, by its shortness and bedraggled insignificance, accentuated the thickness of the enormous neck, strongly built as a wall.

He still wandered, as he had wandered for years, urged thereto by the supreme restlessness that comes to all of Nature's journeymen born—a restlessness which, by its relation to "the something within" Shelley told us of, is only to be satisfied by the perfection of harmony to be found in changing Nature.

What Moosewa did not know about the wild was not worth knowing. His experiences had been so varied, his range so wide, that he must have been a stupid beast indeed who failed to emerge educated.

Every chapter of his life had a curious knack of developing suddenly. They began tamely, often dully, and then, almost before he was prepared for them, great happenings occurred. He found himself expecting these spectacular effects after a time, taking them as a matter of course, and when he reached the half-toned beginnings of a trek which landed him on the Kenai Peninsula, the big bull thought to himself, "Something will come of this." And sure enough something did—a something not

reckoned with, a crushing force his wit could not repel, but a something the grand old bull, could he have chosen, would not, perhaps, have had otherwise. He had seen so many of his kind going down the slope, seen splendid heads dwindle to nothing, and, discounted, vanish from forest ken; watched moose after moose grow up only to meet a tragic end at the fangs of wolf or winter.

Moosewa was the most magnificent moose the Alaskan Peninsula had ever produced. There might be better in the Kenai. It was doubtful. It seemed to him utterly impossible that he could lose his pride of place—be the sport of hazard; that Nature, whom he loved in all her moods, could be relentless enough to put him out of action. He saw himself, king of the forest still, going down the years untouched by Time.

And yet, rather than see in the deep lake pools his wonderful head lessening in size and majesty, and his body turned to a thick unshapeliness, he would, I think, have chosen to die in the heyday of his beauty.

He was completely happy. That is the wonder of the wild. The glories of the forest were all for him; every dawn brought something new, and

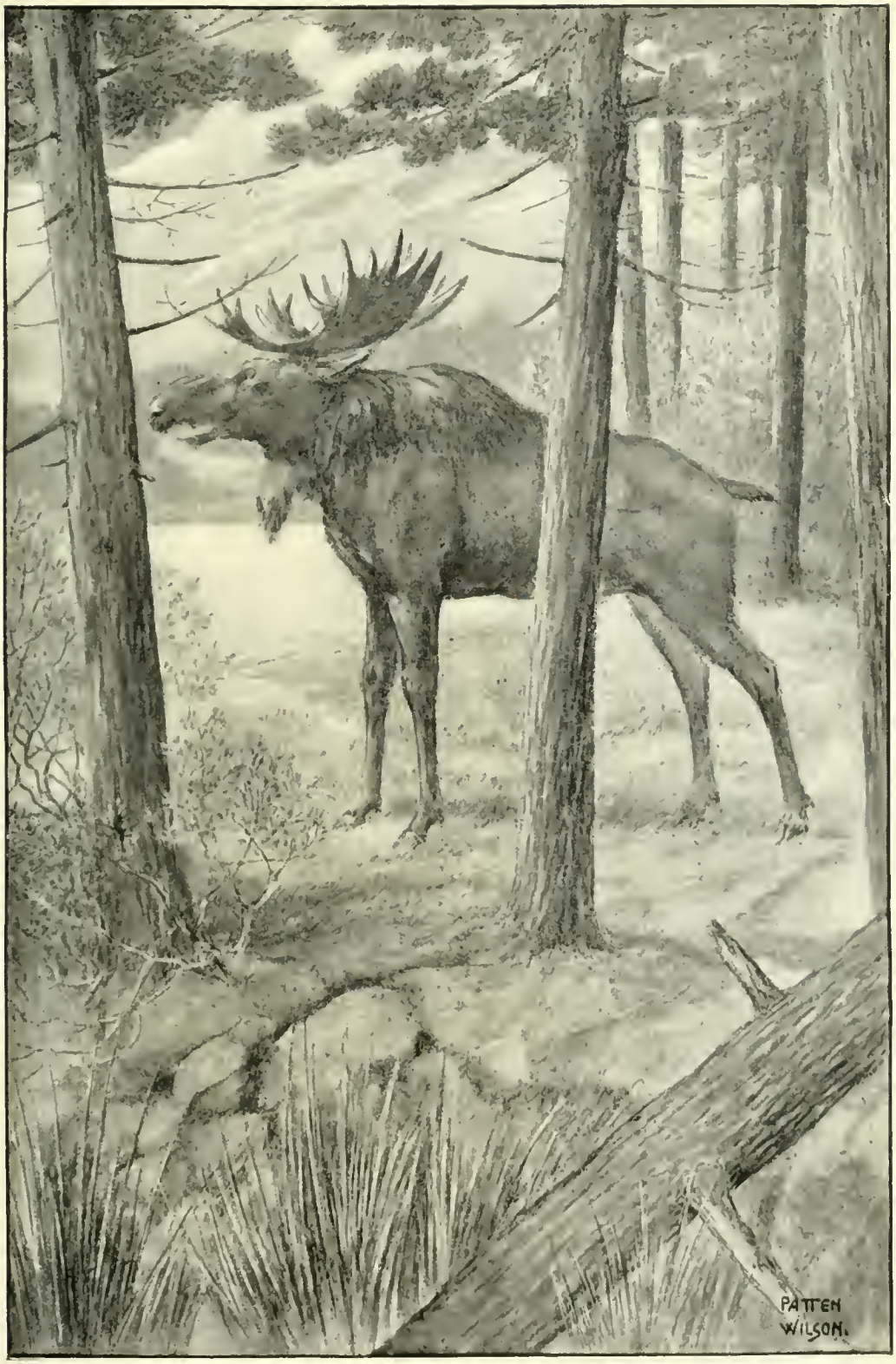
everywhere he could trace the history of the world in which he lived; each morning come on romance in footprints, tragedy in massed tracks, "sermons in stones, and good in everything."

A grim, silent country lay around him—a land of desolate barrens, wild woods, and fierce waters; but he had freedom and omnipotence—gifts of the gods!

His wisdom and strength was such that, barring some extremely untoward occurrence, he had naught to fear from any enemy save man. And man troubled the headwaters of the Sushitna very little.

As he walked sombrely and slowly through the timber lands, with the odd clack, clacking which ever marked his measured coming, the ground rose up before him into billowy ridges fissured with small watercourses. Farther, the forested area merged into a high barren, where the slope became acute, and cut a straight line between the waving grasses and the sky.

He pressed upwards, for beyond the barring horizon lay all the lure of the October world—antlered bulls to fight and conquer, cows roaming in the thick underbrush, lakes to wallow in, and



KING OF THE FOREST

young shoots putting forth new buds in the late fall.

His back right hoof struck against something hard, and turned it up—a mastodon tooth, washed down from the river-banks during the floods of spring or snowfalls of winter; for the bones of prehistoric monsters lie buried in many of the shale bluffs along the Kuskoqwim and Sushitna Rivers.

The glowing October light outlined the massive form of the moose as he stood with head upraised on the summit of the ridge, and threw into strong relief the beauty of his dauntless attitude.

He stood so still because he was puzzled.

Many times he had seen foam curling up the rocks of lakes, wavelets, too, chasing each other to shore, but never anything like this grey-blue sheet lying below, moving unceasingly, to break upon the shores of a timber-strewn inlet.

Across the face of the shining water the restless, white-pinioned sea-birds streaked in bands of whirling brown, and opalescent clouds, fragile and filmy as gossamer, reflected in patches of fringed shadow their changing, passing evolutions.

What he saw was the sea.

The marvels of the most wonderful river in his world paled before the silent strength of the ever-stirring strait, which seemed an ocean, and was the Knik Arm, above Cook's Inlet.

Many varieties of ducks paddled about close to shore: jerkily-moving pintail, with the two great tail-feathers which help foster the likeness this bird bears to the pheasant; scoters swimming in "open order"; restless golden-eyes; and solemn-looking phalaropes. Picture a sandpiper riding the breast of the waves, buoyant as a cork, lightsome as a bit of thistledown, and you have the phalarope. Iridescent cormorants perched on rocks, puffins scurried over the water, and the graceful Arctic tern, first cousin to the swallows, gyrated in the air.

On a crooked limb of a dead pine a bald-headed eagle perched contemplatively. No movement of the winged stragglers below escaped his brilliant, straw-coloured eyes, and he listened to every faint sound eagerly, dropping his gaze now and then to the ground as the chopetty-chop of Moosewa's hoofs striking one against the other sounded clear.

The pure white head and neck, from which this eagle has been all erroneously christened "bald," was silhouetted against the wonderful blue of the

luminous sky, and the slanting rays of the autumn sun merged the primary wing-coverts into their shafts of golden-brown, and turned the whity-brown tail to a wisp of fire.

Honck! Honck!

The bald eagle stiffened, and fixed his gaze on a speck coming down the Arm and growing larger and larger each instant. A black goose, remnant of a migrated army, flying low, and indicating by his wavering flight that he was tired and didn't know in the least where he was going to, and had his doubts that he would ever get there. Curving his neck, he tucked his powerful tail close, and hit off the exact steering angle he wanted; then he turned landwards.

As the goose neared the tree standing sentinel-wise on the heights, the eagle shook the whole of his body and launched himself into the air, screaming, darkening the water beneath with his seven feet expanse of wing. Ducks rose in myriads and scuttled away down the Arm, quacking above the Æolian music of their whistling feathers.

The goose saw his foe and his fate in a flash, and doubled at once, and mounted and wheeled and manœuvred and parried in futile attempts to escape

the talons of the screeching eagle, whose main scheme of attack was to prevent the harried prey from taking the water. This was adroitly accomplished by a series of feints and upward strikes which kept the goose flying high.

In the face of such tactics the courage of the migrating straggler failed all at once. He had put up a good fight, often eluding his antagonist for a stroke or two, but at last his wing-beats grew feebler—he barely moved. He seemed about to fall into the Arm, when the eagle with a maniacal screech drove the goose landwards in a dying rush by a fierce talon blow on the outer wing.

Just over the inlet where the river came down the goose dropped on the rocks—a huddled heap.

And Moosewa saw it all, but it did not impress him. He was so used to wilderness tragedies—used to the everlasting preying and food-seeking. In the wild all is one long struggle for survival. No excuses are made, none wanted. Animals and birds kill to live, just as we human things are killing each other every day, only in civilization we do the butcher work after our own long-drawn-out fashion.

He stood so close to the water's edge that in the

translucence of the water he could see the weed moving and waving, a riot of labyrinthine colour, and follow for a moment the darting shoals of silver fish flashing through the green.

What lay beyond? The opposite shore, four miles away, lay hazy and dim. Whatever fate held in store, the struggle at least was his. Crashing down through the underbrush, he took the water, wading deep ere he struck out powerfully, like the strong, expert swimmer he was. Everywhere was the rolling swell, and great baulks of white driftwood washing shorewards with the tide.

It was a longer distance than the swimmer had ever tackled. Lakes and rivers, lagoons and wide backwaters—he had crossed them all easily, but this width of sinister-looking sea needed an effort for its conquering.

He did not strike sail to the momentary fear that possessed him, but laboured on through the miles mechanically, lessening the yards lying between him and his goal at an amazing rate. His length of head lay outstretched, crowned by the antlers rising above the waste of waters like the skeleton spars of some derelict fairy ship.

His long, stilt-like legs touched bottom, and, by

no means done, the big moose hauled out, grunting, on a little beach, the threshold of a new world—the Kenai Peninsula.

Still grunting, he shook himself vigorously, tossing his horns back on his flanks. Then, dripping water in rivulets as he moved, he walked towards the forest belt at a slow pace, into a thick tangle of green such as his heart loved.

Here and there blackened, bare tree-stems held up maimed limbs in piteous appeal. A desolate bit of country, licked up by forest fires, but with a kindly carpet of the ever-ready devil's club to make the poor nakedness less acute.

Forest fires sometimes burn on the Kenai Peninsula, but not to any extent. Though the growth of grass is, in places, wonderful, the dews at night are so heavy that a fire—invariably the work of native incendiaries—goes out by degrees as it gets on to fresh ground.

Some thirty years ago the forest was set on fire by Kussiloff natives, and several thousands of acres of timber was destroyed. It is on this very ground, where the young birch and willow have grown up amongst the dead and fallen fir-trees, that the moose of to-day gets the fine browsing which

has resulted in the surpassing size of the Kenai heads.

Moosewa was moving daily farther and farther into a region of mammoths. An alien from the Alaskan Peninsula, he ought to have been afraid; but he feared nothing but the occasional evidence of the near presence of man, particularly above the indent of Turnagain Bay.

He sought the great lakes, and went forward tirelessly.

The rain fell ceaselessly. Since leaving his own portion of Alaska a fortnight ago, the moose had not known one day without its downpour. He was used to water, was accustomed to browse "between whiles," until he found that there weren't any in the Kenai—a place of no half-measures.

If there was much game afoot, he did not know it, so close did the forest-dwellers lie up. And all traces of their passings to and fro was wiped out by the floods of water as a sponge cleans a slate.

He was glad when the frost at night dried things up a bit, and a light snow—first of the winter—fell.

Coming to a belt of heavy timber, with a thickly growing underbrush, near the great lakes, typical

moose country, the wanderer strode into the domesticities of some of his tribe. A bad-tempered old bull, with one eye missing, had attached to himself two cows with yearling calves; another, a fine, upstanding young animal, whose horns in no way matched, for all their Kenai pasturage, those carried by the alien from afar, had contented himself with the society of one soft-eyed cow, young, and pretty as a moose cow can be.

The one-eyed moose had drilled his small harem into fine order, and kept vigilant watch lest his belongings strayed towards the browsing grounds ranged over by the much handsomer younger bull, whose cow often edged in the direction of the old beast. Often as she did so her outraged lord was after her on the instant, and cuffing her about none too gently, showed her the error of such ways.

Hanging on the heels of the well-guarded females were many bulls, two and three year olds, who were kept at a respectful distance from the cows they admired so much by the constant rushing charges of the bulls in possession. To say that their lives were strenuous is to convey but little idea of the state of tension. They had no time to eat, to rest, to sleep.

Then by a hideous mischance the two parties converged, and the strain was at breaking-point. The young cow, calling on a low, luring note, precipitated matters, for the old bull answered her call. He could not have resisted had a dozen devil-sticks barred the way.

The fabric of moose family life was snapped at its foundations, and the younger bull prepared for battle.

Now fight they must for the mastery, or be shamed for ever in the eyes of their enslaver.

At it they went, hammer and tongs, clawing with razor hoofs, circling round each other on lowered haunches, and legs well spread, hugging the ground, clashing their horns together viciously.

They fought until they were dripping with foam, and blood flecked their prehensile muzzles, fought until the one-eyed bull ended the business by a terrific drive which sent the point of one of his antlers into the other's unprotected flank. The young one gave in then and retired, grunting, to a thicket.

The reward of victory—where was she?

Just as the cow sought the shelter of a granitic uncrop, overgrown with a mass of devil's club and

birch saplings, a bull moose, more wonderful in size and shapeliness than any other she had ever seen, passed down the aisles of the forest to the right of the battling warriors. The noise of their clashing horns brought the wanderer to a stand.

The cow looked at him, feeling the wind with sensitive, dilating nostrils. An old moose has a peculiarly unmistakable smell, as indeed have all animals.

Had he been able to catch a glimpse of himself outlined against the drift-snow clinging to the boles of the mighty trees, in the pride of his bulk and height, he would have understood the powerful claim he must make on any moose cow, so that allegiance to another bull must straightway falter.

From the end of his nose to the tip of his stubby tail he measured a fraction over seven and a half feet; his height at the shoulder topped seven feet, and his antlered weight scaled somewhere about 1,600 pounds. He had assumed the dark, thick, autumn coat of all old bulls, preparatory to changing into his winter pelage of grey, with its light brown long hairs.

Calling softly, the cow trotted towards the splendid apparition, and though her previous

admirer, who had won her in open fight, tried to prevent her passing, she swept on in purposeful gait.

Moosewa was waiting for her, grunting in deep chest grunts, and thrashing the trees with his hard antlers. But the one-eyed bull, though badly tired, was not to be caught out like that.

He gave the war challenge quickly, pawing the ground, and Moosewa responded instantly.

Crash! The bulls were at each other, using all the familiar feints and finesses known to their kind, sidling backwards to rush in again on a flying start, which brought the two great heads together with a resounding whack, and all the while bearing in mind the main objective—to drive the points of the antlers home somewhere.

For quite a few seconds the one-eyed bull fought as strongly and energetically as though he had not just emerged from a similar affray, but at last he gave signs of stress, and the telling blows of his opponent wore him down to a battered-looking condition pitiable to see. No longer could he parry the scientific lunges of the untired foe, who, taking a cowardly advantage of the oncoming weakness of the stanch old bull, rushed in, and literally drove the enemy down the rides of the forest.

A soft low call from the shelter of some scrub bushes in the rear, and Moosewa was off in answer.

But for the moose flies life went very well with the two saunterers, who did not know that their interminable treks were taking them very near the camp of some prospectors out after mythical gold, or that the tracks of so large a bull would lie on the snow for days.

It was a bedraggled lynx warned them as he emerged dripping from the river he had swum across. Good hunting "over there" was no longer to be obtained. Small animals and large were on the alert and leaving for the unexplored.

The profusion of shed antlers indicated that this part of the Kenai was a wintering ground for numerous moose. Many recent tracks, too, led to the river and a typical ford to the opposite bank. Here and there were trails of great distinctness and width, evidence of the recent passing of many moose to the water, extending over a period of years.

These things lulled Moosewa's roused fears to rest. This mighty forest belt, a mass of green on greens and heavily timbered glades, was the ideal

abiding-place ; and in such density stalking would be a matter of difficulty.

Then the weather broke, and the rain fell in a continuous downpour, which was the precursor of a furious storm which raged all night. As the tearing wind whistled through the forest, the chances of the moose escaping being flattened out by some tree going down before the wrath of the tempest were not worth much. All around them the branches crashed to the earth, and the roar overhead sounded like a river in spate.

With the morning the gale passed, and a glorious day was sandwiched in ere the wilderness people returned to the winter of their discontent. To emerge from one rain to enter another! Well, 'twas the way things went.

The pale sun reappeared at last, after a long seclusion. Never had old Sol a warmer welcome. All nature aired herself.

The moose were lying ruminating happily in the late morning below the wind of the game-trail, when a sudden snap alarmed them. It was such an ominously sounding snap, unexpectedly uncontrollable, almost as though its maker had surprised himself.

They were on their long legs instantly, and before they had time to wheel off at a gallop the cow dropped to an ill-placed bullet, which got her in the knee-joint.

Her plight scourged Moosewa to strength. He was sensible of nothing save that the cow was grievously hurt, and lashing round and round in the scrub-bushes with her leg broken. It seemed to the big bull that he had courage enough to face the fire-stick itself and trample it into the earth.

He wheeled round, looking the mammoth he was.

Standing waist-deep in the grass the prospector brought up his rifle, and it cracked like ice splitting on a frozen lake. The bullet just missed the bull by a hair's breadth, and showed him the imminent danger in which he stood.

His courage evaporated. He would like to charge the destroyer, batter him to pieces, cleave him from forehead to chin with a razor hoof. But —the fire-stick! It was all-powerful. Who could stand against it?

His dash and power ebbed as the human smell tainted all the air. A curious nerve-destroying aroma, crueller than the skunk at his worst. It drove the moose into a wild stampede, which put

miles between him and the scene of the disaster ere he brought up to rest.

He did not mourn for his cow long—there were so many cows—but made love whilst the season lasted, madly, joyously, and fought and won always, to lose again sometimes ; for moose cows are contrary as human feminine things, and changeable as the tides.

On a western slope the tents of two English sportsmen were pitched in a sheltered corner overlooking a diminutive lake they had christened Lake View, because it overlooked a natural dam, not to mention the ones it overheard.

With them was a native whose fame as a moose-caller was a growing one. Another season's practice, and he would rival the celebrated Andrew Berg himself, most renowned of all Alaskan hunters.

Pitka, with his personality, his high wages, and his skill, worthily represented the few professional callers in the country. " Cheap at any price " his satisfied patrons told each other as they measured the antler span of a picked beast attracted to the muzzle of their rifles by the irresistible challenge lure.

Pitka was a hunchback, almost a dwarf, with an alert perception which had made him master of

forest lore. Unlike most Alaskan natives, he knew the names of the birds, whence they came and went, wherefore, and why. The trees, the herbage, the grasses, and the rushes by the river, were full of meaning for the small Aleut. A natural hunter, his methods of attack, common sense, and highly developed cunning, to say nothing of his powers of endurance, brought him approachably near the standard of an African tracker. Fishcraft, and seacraft too, was his by right of birth.

Many Alaskan natives can guide and know the whereabouts of game. Some are excellent still-hunters, but where Pitka shone was in making the challenge call of the bull moose with mouth and hands, a method which is said to be limited in its effect, owing to its short carrying power. In Pitka's adroit manœuvres the results were astonishing. He could call up a moose, not necessarily a good head, but a moose, when he willed.

And with the usual times, early morning and late evening, most chosen, Pitka would have nothing whatsoever to do. Time was made for slaves. His hour of hours was a late one, and given the choice, he would demand a moon.

He led his two excited sportsmen through the

weirdness of the forest and the witchery of the night, down open glades, lit with shafts of silver glory, beneath slanting shadows falling athwart the eerie spaces, far out beyond the bend of the river, and there he stopped to allot positions.

Instead of giving the call in the open, as one always sees it in pictures, the hunchback set himself about four feet away from the largest tree in his vicinity, a huge boled hemlock, and as the grunting, sighing, coughing roar struck against the tree-stem, the sound broke up and rang through the woods, broken, realistic, the actual insolent challenge of a forest monarch spoiling for a fight. Again and again the ringing call, full of pulsating life, an imperious summons, afire with furious throbbing passion.

Lying half asleep in thick underwood, Moosewa heard the lure echo down the aisles. It wakened him and thrilled through his veins like a song. Listening, he caught the throb of the wild, harsh call again. A tingling, as of fire, ran up and down his spine. He rose to his feet stiffly and waited.

The call once more. And all in the world, save two or three nocturnal hunters, who did not count, slept. What did it mean?

The wisdom of his wise mother came back to him down the years, bidding him take care. The challenge note, howsoever alluring, was not inimitable!

"Be warned! Be watchful! Pay no heed!"

It rang in the vibrating summons, sobbed to him from the trees, murmured in the grasses, tinkled from the river.

"Be warned! Be watchful! Pay no heed!"

So might the old cow have counselled, all ignorant of the strength of masculine desire. Behind the battle-cry lay the wild untrammelled passion of primeval spirits.

It drove away reason, was the death of circumspection—it was irresistible.

The call again!

Straight as an arrow from the depths of the forest Moosewa broke into the open, coming at a quick lumbering trot, his nose high in the air, his magnificent antlers lying along his flanks.

Higher went the weighty head, and in bellowing resonant tones he gave the answering battle-cry. Sobbing and panting it twisted on the silence, "To arms! To arms!"

The big beast stood, tense and rigid, listening,

listening. He was so close to Pitka that the hunchback could count his antler points easily, and gather that he was looking on horns which exceeded in size and symmetry the finest Alaska had produced.

Why did not the personally-conducted tourist sportsmen take the wondrous chance? Was ever so easy a shot? The veriest tyro must have brought it off.

The nearest got up his rifle and—missed by that hair which old Omar says divides the false and true.

Off went the moose, like a stone from a catapult. He made an almost impossible mark as he dashed away. Deer in daylight thickets are difficult to see, but at night in the tricky shadows and moonlit slants are wellnigh invisible.

Chagrined beyond the telling, the little hunchback levelled his own prehistoric weapon, a rusty Winchester, and pulled off. The bullet told heavily, but the moose did not drop to it, nor slacken his tempestuous rush. Through the thick cover his thundering pace carried him, and so to safety.

CHAPTER XII

MOOSEWA'S DEATH

"I myself must hunt this deer to death."

Henry VI.

He lay under a spreading hemlock, whose moss-grown arms made a canopy above his head. In front a wide river surged, a glorious sweep. The heavy dew of the night had brought out the strong tang in the pines; even the grass smelt resinous.

The startling event of the previous evening had strung the deer's nerves to breaking-point. Now, as he rested in the shelter of the woodland sanctuary, he felt his muscles relax and slacken, and the burn in his haunch cool. Curious! It took him back across the years to the trading-post, to the day of the branding, the pain he was enduring was so reminiscent. Sharp and strong, and from its centre hundreds of shooting pricks radiated, each one a separate stab.

He must get back to his own region—however

far away it was. The murmur of an alien river filled the air, as its waters slid gently over the muddied shoals, and tossed to and fro the skeletons of long-dead salmon. It was very peaceful, infinitely solemn and beautiful, but—not his own place. But for this ill-omened journey his wound had never been!

The small sweet sounds of the forest people, so soon to be stilled, never ceased. The chirr and chirp and shrilling of insects, the whistle of the woodpecker, the soft rustle of a sinuous chestnut mink making his cautious way through the underbrush, the ducks gathering for flight—the moose loved them all. Mysterious siren tongues—he had heard them from his baby days.

The great transition was at hand. The chill, fierce winter would soon hold the dells and dingles in her icy grip, the face of Nature would frown again, the raving of the tempest invest the wilderness in cruelty. Would that he might be in his own corner of the wild when the world-mother took on once more the colours and the grace of spring!

Like brown gnomes, the rabbits skipped from hiding-places in the grass; an otter slid from his

holt and took the water soundlessly; a musk-rat from the colony in the river-bank snorted, and the faint aroma of him blew in on Moosewa as he lay.

If it might be that a strong bull moose could travel so far that he outdistanced, and for ever, these human things who lived but to deal death and desolation wheresoe'er they went! He would try. This Kenai country, with its settlements here, its settlements there, was no moose country—a death-trap merely.

In the extremity of his terror of the night before one thought crowded in on him, and one memory, excluding all others—the thought of his long-dead mother, who had so warned him against the challenge call, and the memory of the island where the beavers built and the black bear denned up.

It was all many years agone—the weariness in the bull's limbs told of that. But if he could find the island, no human devastators would be there. If he could find the island!

The moose sought the river. The persistent flies and myriad biting gnats troubled him, and his wound had commenced to throb again. Haltingly and slow, half-dragging, half-carrying his injured leg, he pushed off into the water deep, deep until

it almost covered him, and he felt the cool lave of it on his hurt. There he lay wallowing.

A moose cow loomed on the shore, unwieldly and inelegant, with a tiny calf sauntering beside. She drank deeply, and the little one breathed upon the water as though to discover of what this wealth of liquid was composed. At intervals the cow raised her square wet nose and called to the bull on a peculiar note, not loud, but very penetrating. The urge in it lured him from the pool, grunting his pleasure, and at a slow pace, still limping slightly, the dripping beast, with great swelling shoulders, hunched and deformed-looking, walked across the open patch fringing the forest belt.

Someone fired at him, and he staggered to the shot, but did not fall. With a tremendous effort he made for the timber line and gained it.

All pretence at scientific stalking abandoned, the two English sportsmen, who had so bungled their extraordinary chance of the night before, rushed after the moose at a speed which was rather remarkable, considering the setbacks.

Tracking was difficult, for there were but few guiding signs. Scarcely a blood-spot was visible, as is the way with wounds inflicted by any of the

small-bore rifles. Carefully the stalkers spoored this way and that, groping through the boundless forest tract, until after a heavy, breathless chase, they came up with the wounded bull, very sick, in a clump of alders. Out he jumped, game to the last, and with a gigantic spring cleared the scrub bushes like a bird.

The fast thundering rush slackened as a cavernous hole of volcanic origin yawned ahead, and, turning sharply, the hunted deer sped across the open to a thick belt of cover on the left flank.

They were like to lose him again unless one of them did something. Pitka was badly placed, but he had the chance of a crossing shot, and took it, aiming well forward, knowing from experience that one step of those powerful hoofs would carry the moose yards ahead whilst the finger was pressing the trigger.

The bullet richocheted away among the tree-stems, followed by two more haphazard ventures.

Pitka, whose disgust expressed itself in silence, ceased to follow. He knew all about wounded moose, knew that the fine bull was strong enough and courageous enough to stampede for miles. The sportsmen might write him off their bag.

Not since he had convoyed an American magnate who bungled all his shots had the hunchback served such tyros as these. They had come to Alaska, surely, to blast the rising reputation of an honest and expensive hunter. Of what avail was the power to call up an unmatchable moose only to lose him in the end?

And when the younger sportsman came on a collection of recently formed "stamping" places (which the bull moose makes by pawing with his fore-feet until he gets a saucer-shaped morass, five feet or so in diameter), by which he suggested sitting up in a tree to wait for the reappearance of the game, Pitka's last shred of patience deserted him. He "went sick," and left the tyros to hunt alone.

Therefore was Moosewa safe from pursuit, even if it had been easy to come up with him. He stayed well, going firmly and strong, until he had covered ten miles or more, and still the Kenai River, twisting and winding, threaded its silver way beside.

His wounds and his weariness made themselves felt at last, and he sank to rest, with his exquisite head dropped, as though the great weight of it added to the strain.

His little day had passed—the stricken creature

knew that quite well. He might live awhile and suffer on, but the sun had set. The vagabond existence he loved, free as the wind and the weather, the perfection of his grace, the infinite strength in his limbs, gone—all gone.

He had seen moose come and go, and other forest creatures rise and fall, there, where the last purples of the pea-vine spread its arras, and the hermit thrush fluted its autumn song. He could imagine nothing better than a life such as he had led for eleven years, and because he loved it, and asked no more than leave to live it, he must lay it down.

He passed over the game trails threading to the river weariedly, trying to obtain sufficient food to keep the fire of life alight, but the effort to reach the topmost leaves—the lower ones had gone long since—was too much for him. He could straddle the bushes no more; his haunch was all but paralyzed. What tall bushes he had encompassed once! And now the most stunted alders of them all flaunted their tops before his eyes victoriously.

At night as he lay in the unfathomed spaces he realized that something was always near him, a ghostly presence he could not see. It came

with a strange, soft sound like a breath, quite unlike that of any small animal rustling through the density, and until the dawn broke it was with him.

That night the same, the next night also, and then Moosewa knew.

It was Lucivee, the lynx.

He sat in the lustrous, first light of day washing his glossy coat, and as the big bull stood up stiffly, the cat leered over its shoulder and then went on licking fur.

That so small a thing as a lynx could terrorize a mammoth seems an odd thing, but it was the cat's persistency did it. Perhaps he smelt the blood which sometimes fell from the spreading and suppurating wound; perhaps he had counted the days and the chances. Whatever tempted him, his soft-cushioned feet never took him far.

When darkness fell the weak moose fixed his little sunken eyes on the inky blackness ahead, fearful lest in some chance moment of unconsciousness the lynx, taking his quarry unawares, might make it impossible for him to put up much of a fight.

Everything in the woods he so loved frightened him. The wind, shrieking and moaning in the

pine-tops, the sound of the stream as it thudded into the dead cave-roots of overhanging trees, the croak of the raven scavengers cleaning up decomposing drift salmon—they were all part of the fear that lay over him like a pall.

Other moose there were about him. One fine seven-year-old, carrying a good head, though not very massive or wide in the beam, sometimes looked in on the derelict and gave him greeting. But when the youngster saw how fragile was the thread which bound the older beast to life, he lost interest and sought another companion.

And the lynx was always there, waiting tirelessly. Another had joined him, and once or twice two evil-spirited kittens came and fought one another in the underbrush.

The moose still thought of his own district. If he pressed south or north, or west or east, hereabouts he must come on mining camps, salmon canneries, trading-posts. Then, as his wits grew feebler, and the wonderful instincts Nature had endowed him with dimmed, he believed the swiftly flowing river to be the arm of the sea by which he had crossed from the Alaskan Peninsula. Its rock-stirred waters he mistook for the dull swell

of the tide, its lesser width for the miles he had tackled so boldly. He stood on the shore, gazing across the divide. In and out between his splay feet the mud oozed and gurgled The birds were gone now. It was deathly silent.

The sun climbed over a gleaming white cone, most lofty and noble of all the distant peaks, and the rays reflected a thousand tints with a brilliancy only to be seen in far northern climes. The light danced and flickered on the highest snow-clad tops, and fell slowly athwart the river, outlining the fretted clumps of trees lining the farther shore.

Slowly the moose turned his massive head and looked behind him into the deeps of the forest. If the lynx was there—what matter ?

The immense freedom ahead, the cold nip in the breeze as it stirred his thick coat, and the urge in his blood to return—to return—to return—gave him courage. Throwing his antlers back in very gladness, he blared out the challenge call, proudly, triumphantly, then listened intently. Again the coughing, panting roar. It sang over the water, the trees beat it back, and somewhere in the bluffs away to the west the echoes caught it and cried its requiem.

Down wind rang a far-away answer, trembling on the silence. And it came from the farther shore.

Purposefully the great moose waded deep, deep, and then struck out. Almost at once he realized his impotency. He might plunge with his fore-legs and labour with his shoulders and beat and struggle, but the wound in his haunch had so paralyzed the muscles that their powers had gone.

His terror was such that it overmastered him physically. He could not draw his breath, it panted from him in deep, slow gasps. The throb of his heart was choking him.

The water carried him along a few yards, and then his courage and resolve stayed him a moment, until a maëlstrom caught him and swirled him into midstream.

* * * * *

"The record moose head of the world came from the Kenai district, and was taken by a native from an animal discovered drowned in the river, and caught in some scrub alders overhanging the banks. The span of antlers of this wonderful trophy came out at eighty-one inches, and is now in the possession of a New York club."

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